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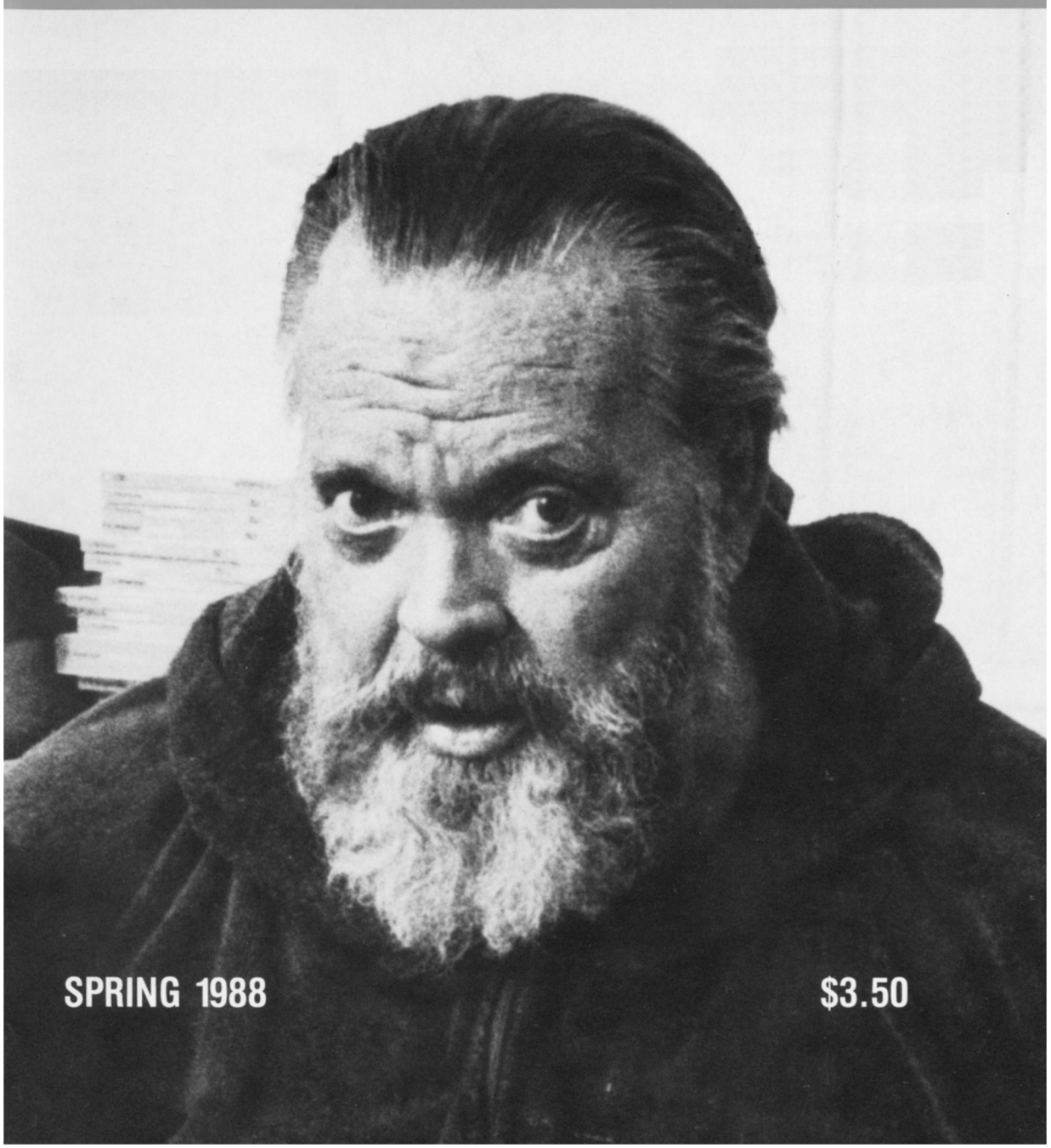

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RUTH PERLMUTTER

Working with Welles:

An Interview with Henry Jaglom

Amidst the tangle of obsessions, sexual hang-ups, and interior panic that characterize Henry Jaglom's angst-ridden comic films, Orson Welles has remained a constant figure. Acting along with Tuesday Weld and Jack Nicholson, he helped Jaglom launch his first feature film, *A Safe Place* (1970), and in 1985, he made what turned out to be his last public appearance in Jaglom's current film, *Someone To Love* (1987). Jaglom in turn, as a consequence of his lifelong admiration of Welles, has faithfully recorded their film consultations over the years in *The Jaglom/Welles Tapes: How the Studios Silenced a Genius.* He has also used his New York feistiness and almost naive concern with decent human values to champion Welles's failed or aborted projects. Without success, he exhorted his powerful Hollywood producer friends to support Welles's adaptations of *The Dreamers* (Izak Dinesen's gothic tale) and *King Lear,* as well as Welles's last original script, *The Big Brass Ring.* In fact, Jaglom's staunch advocacy of Welles, whom he considers Hollywood's most brilliant director, extended to his outspoken condemnation of the industry's treatment of Welles at the otherwise sedate Hollywood memorial ceremony after Welles's death.

Never one to shirk truth-telling no matter the personal cost, Jaglom is doggedly insistent in pursuit of his goals. The story of how he induced Welles to act in his first feature film, *A Safe Place,* is characteristic. With a letter of introduction from his friend, Peter Bogdanovich, he flew to New York to see Welles at the Plaza Hotel. According to Jaglom, Welles was seated in purple silk pajamas, looking like a big grape, and proclaimed, "I don't do first films without scripts." Jaglom then asked, "But will you at least sit there and listen to me for an hour?" Welles royally crossed his arms and equivocally acquiesced—"I'll sit here but I won't listen." And then the resourceful Jaglom made up a part for Welles on the spot. Since he knew how much Welles liked magic, he told him he could be a magician. "And you'll make something disappear—yourself." The guru of American cinema and thereafter Jaglom's lifelong friend-advisor, perked up. "Can I wear a cape?" he asked, and that clinched it. In a highly unconventional anti-Hollywood film that probes the perilous interior world of a pubescent girl's fantasies and neuroses, Orson Welles became the quirky rabbi/magician/grandfather who guides her through her troubled adolescence.

Once again, in *Someone to Love,* Welles plays an oracular role. Jaglom himself is the protagonist, a film director named Danny, who invites a group of singles (most of whom are actually Jaglom's friends) to an abandoned historic theater in Santa Monica in order to explore why each is alone and always seeking "someone to love." Periodically, Danny turns to the back of the theater where Welles, playing himself, delivers his provocative philosophy of life. Without the usual embellishments of make-up and the film "magic" he adores, Welles poses impudent misogynistic reflections on the reasons for Jaglom's generational anxieties . . . the feminist movement, for example.

In this let's-make-a-movie movie, where characters and author transgress their roles, Welles is a spatially disconcerting icon—he is both in a seat in the theater and a disjunctively imposed montage. Jaglom has him open the film with an ironic post-mortem statement ("Film is always old-fashioned. It is already dead by the time it is on the screen.") and tartly pronounce the film over with the buzz word of his own foiled movie career, "Cut!" when he thinks Jaglom's film should end because it is getting too "sweet."

At one critical moment, as if in response to the problems of separating life from movie-making, the camera desperately pans, asking help from Welles, who is lamentably gone. Yet, at the closing credits, he returns, laughing and applauding, as if to defy death—in film, in life.

•

The following interview occurred on the patio of the Hotel Majestic during the Cannes Film Festival.

The last time we interviewed you here was in 1980, just after you presented Sitting Ducks. *Shall we take up again from that point?*

What happened after *Sitting Ducks*? My life fell apart. *Sitting Ducks* was made when I was a real happy person and I thought everything in life would have a happy ending and that's why *Sitting Ducks* had that kind of you-can-get-away-with-it spirit. Look, it implied, life really does work out.

Then, not in that exact succession, but after a certain period of time, my marriage ended and I was devastated. I went to New York, back to my parent's apartment, back to my childhood to lick my wounds. My poor parents didn't quite know why this rather grown-up son of theirs was going through this, but anyway, slowly, I realized I couldn't make films anymore reflecting the mood of *Sitting Ducks.* I had to deal with what I was in the middle of and I ran into one of my very dark days in New York City, walking the streets crying, talking to myself. I ran into Karen Black, who is an old friend, and had actually been a girlfriend for a year. When I told her what had happened and how sad I was, she said, "Why don't you make a movie out of it?" And I said, "Well, I'll make a movie out of it if you play me. I feel like I now have an unhappy ending of my life. I don't want to accept that. Let's start this movie with an unhappy beginning, with you acting like me emotionally. Your husband has left you and you're walking up and down the streets of New York, crying, talking to yourself out loud, talking to your husband who is no longer there, and that way, perhaps, I can find our way towards a happy ending."

And that's how *Can She Bake a Cherry Pie?* was born. I spent every night at the Café Central on 75th and Amsterdam, and that's where I wrote the movie, on the paper tablecloths. A friend of mine, Michael Margotta, who had acted with me in *Drive He Said,* came by with his untrained pigeons, so I put that in the movie. My brother was around, so I put him in it, as the male lead.

After *Cherry Pie,* I felt stronger and better and ready to really look at what had happened in a more direct way. I realized I could do that with another comedy again, and that's how *Always* was conceived. I talked to Patrice and she

Henry Jaglom and Andrea Marcovicci in SOMEONE TO LOVE

was willing and we shot it, as you know, in the house we lived in, which is still the house I live in L.A. It was a profoundly strange complex experience and I think a very important one for us and for a lot of the people who have seen the film.

You resumed your acting career again with these last two films. How does being a character and the director work for you?

The first time I starred in my own movie was with *Always,* although I had a bit part in *Sitting Ducks.* As you know, I started out wanting to be an actor but I put that on the back burner until it became clear for *Always* that no one else could play me. I had to stop the idea of having other substitutes emotionally and begin to act out and deal with my real feelings.

I found I could play me *and* direct after a panicky phone call to Orson Welles in the middle of the night. I asked him, "You've done this—acted and directed. What do I do now?" He said, "Well, separate the two functions. When you direct, don't pay any attention to acting, just direct. You will look like you're a person in the scene, that doesn't matter. When you're acting though, do as many single shots as possible and pay absolutely no attention to directing, just act." That's what happened and that's how I got through it very comfortably.

You've had the idea of working with Orson Welles again in some form or another, for a long time now—ever since A Safe Place. *How did his part take shape in* Someone to Love*?*

Orson has always been a mentor for me. He used to say, "When you have a dilemma in life, you turn it into art." The dilemma which gave birth to *Someone to Love* is why am I and my generation so alone in life. In fact, it's the logical picture after the divorce picture. So many of my generation are finding themselves alone in the middle of their lives because their dreams of marriage haven't worked out.

I decided to use Orson as a kind of Greek chorus in the film after he saw the rough cut of *Always*—he was the first person to see my rough cuts. His response to the film was, "I'm jealous." I said, "How can you—the man who has made some of the greatest movies in the world—be jealous?" And he, always freely admitting he was bigger than life, said, "Yes—but I've always hidden behind masks all my life. Here in *Always,* I see a film-maker not hiding. I'd like to do that once before I die." So when I started to plan *Someone to Love,* I told him I wanted him to be in it. And I said, I'd like it to be you as you, not as your public persona. We'll really get Orson Welles on screen. He answered, "Nobody wants to see that." I disagreed and when we started shooting, he proceeded to produce seven or eight wonderful masks—he wanted to know what kind of nose to wear. It took me a whole lunch to talk him out of that. He kept saying, "Nobody cares, nobody's interested." And of course, he pretended I'd tricked him. So, for the first time, you see Orson as he was: warm, teaching, loving, and sweet. He really is Orson up on the screen. It is not some Orson performance behind a fake nose or a persona he's inventing. It was very moving to me. I got totally messed up seeing it yesterday with the Cannes audience—seeing them getting to know Orson and thanking me for letting them see him for the first time—and unfortunately, for the last.

There's a point in the film where you don't know what to do. It's a critical moment where you were still being filmed and yet you didn't have any more film in the camera, and Helen had walked out angrily.

Yes, I said, "What do I do now?" and looked to see where Orson was, and he was gone, because Orson's dead. So you can't always be helped by somebody, and whoever your Orson is goes away, and you have to try to figure out the ending yourself.

Yet, you have him come back in the end—surprisingly, at the credits, when people think the film is over.

Yes, I did something which, if he hadn't died, would not be in the movie. After he says, "Cut" because he felt the film needed to be over and I signalled to the cinematographer to cut, I flicked the camera back on, and all the actors started to applaud him, and he looked around, genuinely and modestly delighted. Then suddenly, he roared out the greatest, most delicious, enfolding laugh you've ever seen on a screen. And then he applauded back. So the last image of the film is Orson applauding, as I see it, us, his audience for 50 years.

How much do your actors improvise and how much of what Orson Welles says is his own contribution?

I don't bother with precise dialogue. I want actors to use their own language. Sometimes I just give them opening or closing lines. Every word Orson said he meant, but he also liked to be provocative. He knew he would get some reaction. All I wanted was what he claimed he had never gotten on film—the real Orson Welles as if you were having lunch with him. Of course, he said a whole lot more than I used and I'm preserving the excess on videotape.

Where was he when others were on stage?

I used two cameras at the same time, one on Orson at all times and the other on those who came up on stage. As I said, I devised him as a kind of Greek chorus, trying to help me push my confusion in life and turn it into art. He tries to put my personal emotions into a universal context. I chose to make it seem as though there were no visual connection between his space and the others, because just as in *A Safe Place,* where he comes to the protagonist's head when she needs him, I wanted him to be grander than life in this film. He's good as an actor only when he has that role. If you put him in real space and time, it would take away from that persona. He was magical, on his own plateau, so I shot him separate from everyone. He said, "They should never know where I am. I could be anywhere in the theater. I'll be in different places and they'll never know where I am." But to save him from moving, I cut it tight without his having to change seats.

When we first met, you were still part of a nucleus of great film friends, all working together with a collective spirit. Is that still happening or has it fallen apart as a group?

The group has fallen apart even though we're still friends and see each other. Nicholson is making huge commercial films, Hopper is having a revival as an actor and is starting to direct again. I think Hellmann is over here to start a new film. It's pretty hard to sustain a collective experience.

Any plans for the future?

I have just finished a new film, that I'm going back to cut. It's called *New Year's Day*. I play a guy like me who doesn't want to live alone in this house in Los Angeles anymore. He comes to New York too late to start over in life. He sublets an apartment from three young girls in their twenties who haven't gotten out yet because of a one-day mistaken overlap in their lease, and I find myself smack in the middle of their lives and watch what they are going through—their loves, their losses. It gives me courage to go on.

Sally Kellerman in SOMEONE TO LOVE

HENRY JAGLOM: FILMOGRAPHY

A Safe Place, 1970, with Tuesday Weld, Jack Nicholson, and Orson Welles. A provocative semi-autobiographical study of rich urban hippies. The film dismantles Hollywood conventions in the manner of the blurred dissociative space and time in the films of Alain Resnais.

Tracks, 1975, with Dennis Hopper and Dean Stockwell. One of the earliest anti-Vietnam films. A surrealist train voyage across America, with Hopper as a war-dazed Vietnam veteran accompanying the return of the coffin of his black buddy to his home town.

Sitting Ducks: A Film About Sex, Money and Vitamins, 1980, with Patrice Townsend (Jaglom's ex-wife). A road comedy that is the story of two absconding gambling thieves (one of them Jaglom's "nerdy" brother, Michael Emil) who are involved in a series of zany capers. Jaglom plays the bad guy and à la Godard has his characters steal exactly the sum needed to make the film, while he fittingly has himself killed off in the end so that his characters can be liberated from the adventures—and the movie.

Can She Bake A Cherry Pie? 1985, with Karen Black and Michael Emil [see *FQ,* Summer 1985]. A story about two neurotic New Yorkers who exchange sex, quirkiness, and hilarious misadventures. It is interspersed with a self-referential collage of the movie careers of Jaglom and the actors.

Always, 1985, with Patrice Townsend and Jaglom. A re-enactment of the break-up of their seven-year marriage, with Jaglom still the tortured schlemiel, now an aging leftover from the hippie sixties. Jaglom playfully alters the sad truth of marital betrayals, lies, and jealousies by writing in a wished-for-happy ending.

Someone to Love, 1987, with Jaglom, Welles, Andrea Marcovicci, Michael Emil, Sally Kellerman. As if self-willed, the characters construct and act out their "stories" of missed love and unfulfilled relationships, in order to explore together, group-therapy style, why their generation is so alone.

MANTHIA DIAWARA

Popular Culture and Oral Traditions in African Film

In spite of the increasing number of African films released in the course of the last 20 years (from *Borom Sarret* in 1963 to *Nyamanton* [*The Garbage Boys*] in 1986), there has not been an African film criticism as enlightening and provocative as the criticism generated by the Brazilian Cinema Novo, the theories of Imperfect Cinema, and the recent debates around Third Cinema.[1] This gap must be filled to overcome the repetitious nature of criticism which has addressed itself to African film in the last 25 years and to make possible the definition of a dynamic aesthetic proper to Africa. The lack of African critics who know African traditions is at fault, as well as the critical practice of the West, where the ethnocentrism of European and American film critics has limited them to evaluating African cinema through the prism of Western film language. Thus, they refuse to look at African cinema "straight in the eyes." They think that that cinema is in the process of finding its individuality, that the film-makers have not mastered yet the film medium, that the camera style is still primitive in African films.

European critics are afraid to look at African cinema in the same manner that Africans used to be afraid to watch the first movies from Europe. According to Amadou Hampate Ba, the wise man of Bandiangara, when film was introduced in his village in 1935, the Imam and the head of the village accused it of being loaded with lies, tricks and anti-Islamic goals. In order to protect the village against this diabolical invention imposed upon them by the colonial administrator, the Imam commanded women and children to stay at home. Only men came to the projection and they closed their eyes for the entire length of the film. At the end, the men told the administrator that women and children could not come because they were afraid of the images in motion on the screen.[2]

Today, African cinema must combat this resistance to foreign images. Europeans close their eyes in order not to see the questioning of Western values, the reaffirmation of cultures repressed by the West, and anti-neocolonialist discourses. European critics sent to view these films, in another form of the reactions like those of Amadou Hampate Ba's village chief, bring back inevitably indulgent and nonanalytical comments on African cinema.

To analyze African cinema, one must first understand that 25 years of film production have necessarily created an aesthetic tradition which African film-makers use as a point of reference which they either follow or contest. An African aesthetic does not come merely from European cinema. To avoid making African cinema into an imperfect appendix to European cinema, one must question Africa itself, and African traditions, to discover the originality of its films. In his article, "Sur les formes traditionnelles du roman africain," Mahamadou Kane wrote that "the originality of the African novel must be found more precisely in its relation with the forms of oral literature from 'Black Africa'."[3] In the same article, Kane compared the oral story-teller to the novelist, exploring the themes, the narrative devices, and other features of the novel which also form the basis of the oral tale. He also showed that the novelist, as well as the story-teller, uses realism as a means of expression, resorting to a linear story with one action which enfolds around three units of time (departure, arrival, and return). Like the traditional story-teller, the novelist opts for a didactic enunciation and, consequently, reproduces in the text the apprenticeship of life as well as moral and social codes.

In this article, I will try to bring out the relations between the oral tradition and African cinema in the same manner that Kane does for the novel. I will compare the griot (the bard) to the film-maker, looking particularly at their

Versions of this paper were presented to the colloquium on Film and Oral Literature in Ouagadougou at the 10th Pan-African Film Festival, and to the Center for Black Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. I would like to thank the University of California at Santa Barbara for research and travel support in writing the paper.

Ousmane Sembene's XALA *(New Yorker Films)*

reproduction of traditional modes of being, so as to show the similarities and the differences between their works.

First of all, it seems logical to underline the fundamental difference between oral literature and cinema. The means put into play in the construction of a film—the camera movement, close-ups, and shot/reverse-shots—are not the same as those used by the story-teller. Indeed, the latter enunciates by incarnating characters one by one, dominating the narrative by his or her presence. The griot depends on spoken language as well as on music to actualize the story. The film-maker, on the contrary, uses the means of mechanical reproduction to give shape to the story. Whereas oral literature speaks of life, cinema reproduces an impression of life.[4]

Putting this difference aside, can one say that the originality of African cinema must be found in the oral tradition? Can one also overlook the notion that African cinema had had nothing to inherit when it started its development?[5] According to this postulate, there would exist only one film language, the one to which the West has given birth and which it has perfected. The black film-maker would then only have to place the content of his/her work in a framework that takes its condition of possibility from the rules and precepts already elaborated by Western masters.

However, when African films are examined, one sees that all the directors resort in different ways to oral story-telling forms. As Kane noted in regard to the novelist, the film-maker too is influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by the story-teller's techniques of narrating. "At night, he/she used to be fed with oral tales, historical or cosmogonical legends . . . very often, he/she grew up in a milieu which had a specific mentality as regards the forms of discourse, a sensibility which expressed itself in particular ways."[6]

First it is important to look at the manner in which popular cultures are filmed in African cinema, because such popular practices as song and dance, the performance of the griot, and the representation of African social systems such as polygamy are often used to create the effect of the real in the films. In *Xala* (Ousmane Sembene's 1974 film about independence and the impotence of the new leaders), for example, after the Africans have taken control of the Chamber of Commerce, song and dance are represented to accentuate the transition of power in the story as a return to authenticity. The dance occurring at the beginning of the film, instead of having a fixed exotic meaning as in anthropological films about Africa, is a spectacle open to several interpretations. First one can see in it the desire of the new public employees to be considered traditional, and therefore authentic. But one soon realizes that the dance and music outside are used as masks to hide the incompetence of the new leaders inside, who accept bribes

from the very Frenchmen they had kicked out. Finally, the dance connotes in an ironic manner the representation of half-naked Africans who are always dancing in European and American films. At the level of the signified, song and dance in *Xala* position the spectators to criticize the superficial use of tradition by politicians. The opening scene helps the audience build a revolutionary attitude relative to the regressive behavior of the characters in the film.

In *Visages de Femmes* (*Faces of Women,* a 1985 film by Desiré Ecaré, which tells two different stories about two women in Ivory Coast), song and dance are narrative processes which move the story forward. In this film song and dance, at the beginning and end of the river love scene, constitute a mini-narrative with a beginning, middle, and end. Through their performance, the women tell the story of how a boy and a girl deceived everybody and met in the river to make love. In *Xala* Sembene negates the Hollywood stereotypes of exotic Africans and gives a contextual interpretation to song and dance, but in *Visages de Femmes* Ecaré emphasizes the manner in which song and dance in Africa are used to inform people of what is taking place behind their backs. This balletic cinema, or a cinema that dances in order to tell its story, has its parallel in at least one West African popular theater, the *Koteba,* which also can imitate all forms of representation through dance.

As the dancers of *Visages de Femmes,* in their colorful attire, move to the beat of the music in harmony with the rhythm of the editing and the camera movements, one cannot help but think that Ecaré has invented a new language for African cinema. But how is this aesthetization of an African popular culture, which pushes the spectator to identify with the dancing women, different from the old tradition of constructing the body of women as the site of desire in Western cinema? Furthermore it seems that the dance scene, through the use of medium close-ups of women's feet, arms, and heads, is addressed to the desire of the male spectator, and thus contradicts the love-making in the river which seems to proclaim the sexual freedom of African women. In other words, as Ecaré places song and dance in African cinema, away from anthropological and Hollywood films, he surrenders to the sexist codes of African popular culture which undermine his very attempt to keep alive in *Visages de Femmes* the political commitment of African directors.

This brief analysis of the representation of song and dance in *Xala* and *Visages de Femmes* reveals that the appropriation of popular culture by the fiction film in Africa creates a movement away from Western film language, toward a predominance of traditional narrative codes. Sembene leads this movement by first negating European stereotypes of song and dance in Africa, and by putting into question the African elite's attempt to exploit these popular forms for its own gains. Ecaré's desire to let African dance and song speak in a cinematic language coincides with a phallocentric construction of the characters which turns them into objects of desire for the spectator. *Visages de Femmes* teaches us, thus, the necessity for the film-maker to interrogate popular culture in order to divest it of its manifest and/or repressed phallocentrism.

As regards social practices such as polygamy in African film, two examples suffice to illustrate its cinematic representation. In *Sey Seyeti* (*One Man, Several Women,* 1980), Ben Diogaye Beye puts polygamy and modernity into play in order to bring to light the contradictions in a contemporary African society. Beye constructs polygamy as the common denominator of the problems of several men in the film, and ends by focusing on the freedom of a young woman who is forced to marry an older man. There is no central story in *Sey Seyeti,* which tells one anecdote after another, using polygamy as the over-determining factor. This complex film, which runs the risk of confusing the spectator in the West about the relationships among many characters, or of being dismissed as an example of African avant-garde, shocked the inhabitants of Senegal. When it was released, the film provoked an unprecedented reaction in the press from sociologists, ethnologists, and politicians. Beye was accused by some for looking at polygamy, an African custom, with European eyes, and praised by others for boldly exposing a regressive practice which no longer finds its justification in modern Senegal. The fact that *Sey Seyeti* shocked African audiences, while its message remains opaque or confusing to the spectator in the West, indicates that Beye simultaneously fashioned an African film language while attempting to shed light on

the repressiveness of a popular practice such as polygamy.

In *Finye* (*The Wind,* by Souleymane Cissé, 1983), polygamy is a principal theme. One of the scenes in this film debunks polygamy by exposing its internal contradictions. Indeed, the youngest of the governor's wives takes the initiative in the quest for a lover by expressing her desire for a young man of her age. The man this young woman chases also happens to be the lover of the governor's daughter. Symbolically, therefore, both women have become the governor's daughters and/or wives because they have the same object of desire. What becomes an issue in this scene is polygamy's inability to answer to the emerging needs of sexual freedom in Africa. But the tradition of polygamy is more seriously questioned in the film by the belittling of its social and economic meaning. Women play the role of respectful spouses, who submit to their husbands in order to cheat on them even better and to get from them what they want. For example, in another scene the oldest and the youngest wives stage a mock fight to distract the husband from his commitment to punish a disloyal daughter. As for the governor/husband marrying three wives, which in the past would have served to emphasize his prestige, this now appears as a movement toward the weakening of moral and social values. The youngest wife squanders his money, drinks whiskey, and smokes in front of him. These signs of depravity in a traditional Islamic society are ascribed to modernity and the persistence of polygamy. An understanding of local culture (anthropological signs) is necessary to appreciate the play of the actors as authoritative and phallocentric husband, or oldest and youngest wives. One has to go beyond the simplistic conception of art as functional in Africa and see, for example, the aesthetics over-determined by polygamy in the comic scene of the mock fight between the wives.

The figure of the griot, symbol of the oral tradition, has also been often represented in African films. Historians of African cinema have already studied the griot's presence in Sembene's films. In a pioneering article on the subject, Mbye Cham argues that Sembene sees himself as "the mouth and ears of his people," and in his role as a film-maker, he "prefers to amalgamate, adapt, develop, and enhance certain features of the *gewel* [griot] and the *Lekbat* [*story-teller*]."[7] In her book *The Cinema of Sembene Ousmane* (1984), Françoise Pfaff compares Sembene's cinematic techniques with the griot's narrative techniques. She also analyzes the representation of the griot in films such as *Niaye, Borom Sarret, Xala,* and *Ceddo.* I will limit myself to the figure of the griot seen in a scene of *Borom Sarret:* fat, well-dressed, and even with a gold tooth. By contrast the "Borom Sarret" (cart driver) is skinny, poorly dressed, and tired from his work. The opposition between these two characters is so striking that it reminds one of an earlier scene where Sembene uses high- and low-angle shots to contrast the cart driver with a crippled beggar who crawls on all fours.

Cart driver and griot: BOROM SARRET *(New Yorker Films)*

As money is transferred from the cart driver to the griot, one sees tradition as tainted with obvious corruption. The griot turns tradition into a tool of exploitation when he evokes the cart driver's past nobility in order to take away all the money he has earned for the morning labor. The griot's narrative about the cart driver, which would have been authoritative in oral tradition, is debunked here as exploitative and not inclusive of the contemporary realities that oppress the cart driver. Sembene transcends the griot, therefore, and surrounds him and his old narrative with a new vision which traces the mechanism by which people such as the cart driver are exploited. It is important to notice that in the same scene, as the griot goes on taking the cart driver's money, one young boy shines the shoes of another who is stronger and who leaves without paying. Here again Sembene uses high- and low-angle shots, as he does throughout the length of the film to maintain this hierarchy of power not only between people, but also between the two sides of the city.

The richness of this scene is such that it shows the spectator that a return to tradition, to authenticity, does not always bring about solutions to the problems of Africans such as the cart driver. While criticizing the inhuman westernization of the inhabitants of the Europeanized side of the city, the "Plateau," *Borom Sarret* questions the unconditional return to tradition. Sembene creates a distance between spectators and the characters in the film which enables the spectators to criticize themselves in their tradition. This cinematic language takes its form and content from the figure of the griot, symbol of the oral tradition which Sembene uses as his point of departure. The difference between this first film by Africa's leading director and Western films resides in Sembene's ability to transform Western cinema's exotic characters like the griot and the cart driver into thematic as well as structural elements for the content and the form of his film language.

In *Djeli* (*The Griot,* 1981), on the contrary, Lancine Fadika-Kramo resists this transcendence of the griot's art form. He posits the griot as the point of departure and the master of narrative. *Djeli* starts with a flashback retracing the griot's mythic origin in order to put into question the hierarchies of the caste system. According to this rhetoric, the griot was originally a hunter who changed trades to become a singer, story-teller and musician. Interestingly enough, another West African myth of origins, "Gassire's Lute," states that the griot was a brave warrior who, tired of killing, turned into a musician to follow and entertain the warriors.[8] *Djeli* blames the caste system for the contemporary negative image of griots as inferior to other social groups. To show that this definition of griots is opposed to any revolution of ideas, to love and life, Fadika creates a love story between a man from the griot caste and a woman from another social group so as to reveal the regressiveness of caste systems which suppress such a possibility. The aesthetic in *Djeli* defines itself as a movement out of the stagnation of caste hierarchies, towards a transformation of tradition into an equalitarian system. It is in this sense that the film valorizes "Djeli-ya"—the state of being a griot—through beautiful images of the griottes (female artists), slow-motion shots of griottes singing and dancing, and the flashback which shows that griots were originally equal to other groups. The film positions the spectator to get rid of hierarchical notions, to enjoy the art of the griot, and to see a coincidence between the rehabilitation of griots and progress in Africa.

Finally, in *Jom* (1981), Ababakar Samb paints a romantic figure of griots. According to Samb, they are the historians, the educators, and the guardians of people's conscience. In *Jom* the griot is the main character, the omniscient narrator of the different sketches that form the film, and the immortal persona who travels through time and space. He remains unchanged by age and by the weapons used by the enemies of tradition. Neither money nor fear can corrupt him. He is the griot of the poor as well as of the rich. Samb's griot, like Sembene's narrator in *Borom Sarret,* is a committed activist who fights for the right of the oppressed. He provides leadership and moral support to the factory workers who are on strike, ridicules the eccentricities of the *nouveaux riches* in Africa, and praises the courage and dignity of the migrant workers who had to leave their villages because of the drought.

Samb's construction of the griot and his narrative as master and model respectively for African cinema has for a consequence the subordination of the film-maker's narrative to that of the griot and the creation of a nostalgic mood to serve as a refuge for the spectator. The figure of the griot is used to reinvent a beautiful image of the past. Unlike Sembene, who puts the griot's narrative within a larger narrative, Samb surrenders to the narrative authority of the griot. This romanticization of the griot defines Samb's film language which valorizes tradition as characterized in the film by authenticity, dignity, and truth, and negates modernism as characterized by alienation, colonialism, and exploitation. *Jom* positions the spectator to identify with tradition without any attempt at self-criticism: everything positive is pushed on the side of tradition and everything negative on the side of modernism.

Up to now, I have shown the manner in which elements of popular culture have been incorporated into cinema. I will show now how the structure of oral literature has helped to shape the originality of African cinema. At the beginning of this article, I pointed out that filmmakers, like novelists, are infuenced, consciously or not, by the narrative forms of the oral story-teller. They have been initiated into

oral tradition before going to Western schools. The way the story-tellers narrate becomes their point of reference when they take their first steps at a film school. During the rest of their careers, they are bound to be dealing with oral tradition, to move it sometimes, contrasting it with the modern forms of the novel and of cinema, or even to repress it. One can see the influence of oral tradition in all African films including *Xala, The Money Order, Finye* and *Baara (The Porter),* even where the narrative forms of the classic novel and cinema dominate.

Elsewhere, I showed how Gaston Kabore's *Wend Kuuni* (*The Gift of God,* 1983) makes orality its subject and questions the hermetic and conservative structure of tradition in oral literature.[9] One can also mention Sembene's *Ceddo* as another film which takes the oral tradition for a principal subject and transforms its structure into a revolutionary statement. Sembene's *The Money Order* is a historical landmark because, for the first time in a film by an African director, the actors speak an African language. But it is in *Ceddo* that Sembene posits an archeology of discourse in Africa. The richness of the language in proverbs and sayings, the power of the spoken word and of the speaker, are all represented in *Ceddo*. In the king's court, the discursive space defines itself by including some as members of the discourse in a hierarchical order and by excluding others. The griot, to use the words of Camara Laye, is master of discourse. He controls its distribution and its impact. He is the one through whom the speaking members communicate.

Let's examine the manner in which the subject of orality determines the form of narration in the film. In order to represent the discursive space, the director creates a *mise-en-scène* in which the griot occupies the center of the circle formed by the king's court, the Imam, the missionary and the Ceddoes. The fast editing style of European films is replaced by long takes in deep-focus shots. It is as if the camera has taken the griot's position so as to reveal the directions of speech. There are very few camera movements and close-ups. Shot/reverse-shots are avoided so as not to give the impression that one is dealing with a dialogue scene similar to the ones in Western films.

However, Sembene, like the griot, also makes his presence felt at several points in the diegesis. He is physically present as a Ceddo, carrying firewood on his head, discussing the issue of exile with other Ceddoes, and during the

Sembene's CEDDO (New Yorker Films)

Imam's baptizing of Ceddoes. The use of close-ups of human faces and of objects, in this film where long shots dominate the narration, reveals a didactic intervention on the part of the director. Thus Sembene, like the oral storyteller, determines the reading of the signs for the viewer.

The travel of initiation or the educational quest, which constitutes the structural cell of oral literature, is also an important motif in African cinema (cf. *Borom Sarret, La Noire de . . . , L'Exile, Lettre Paysanne, Wend Kuuni, Njangane, Touki Bouki,* etc.). The quest defines itself as a movement from the village to the city and ends with the return to the village. One can also interpret it as an alienation and a return to authenticity, as is shown at the end of *Touki Bouki,* for example.

Ceddo also moves its characters so as to bring them to an awakening of consciousness. The princess, first kidnapped by the Ceddoes, realizes the exploitation of her people by the Imam and joins the Ceddoes in their resistance against the tyranny of the Imam. What above all differentiates *Ceddo* from the oral narration in its closure. In the oral tradition, the physical return symbolizes the return to the status quo. The griot is conservative and his story helps to reinforce traditional values. In oral traditions, the story is always closed so as not to leave any ambiguity about interpretations. In *Ceddo,* on the contrary, the return denotes the union of the princess and the Ceddoes. Thus the end of the film, a freeze frame, announces the new day pregnant with several possibilities.

Finally, I will end this study by showing the manner in which one of the best films of the Pan-African Film Festival (FESPACO 1987), Cheick Oumar Sissoko's *Nyamanton* [see *FQ,* Winter 1987–88], continues the African film language I have sought to define above. *Nyamanton* constitutes an educational quest, or an initiation trip for the two main characters, Kalifa and Fanta, who travel daily from their home to the neighborhood where they work. The home symbolizes the interior space where tradition is a refuge, safeguarding parental relations. The children play with their grandparents and the resulting laughs help the family go through their daily dificulties. The city represents the outside, the change of setting and imminent danger. The trips between home and the city enable the children to witness the injustice present in their society and to question its permanence.

Nyamanton, too, like *Ceddo,* goes beyond the mere imitation of orality to question the griot who is the master of discourse. In one scene Kalifa says to his friend, Aliou, that his father is the greatest liar after Jali Baba, Mali's famous griot. Aliou answers that griots do not lie, that what they say is the true story and that Kalifa ignores their value. Aliou then starts imitating Jali Baba and sings his friend's praises. One sees in this scene the definition of the griot as a historian on the one hand and, on the other hand, as an artist whose play with words ranks him with liars. But more important than this reference to the figure of the griot and his narrative is the fact that the director's world view takes the place of that of the griot as the most authoritative in the thematization of the kids' relation to everyday life in Africa. In oral tradition, it is through the griot's point of view that one sees and realizes the universe around one. In film, the camera replaces the griot as the director's eyes and constructs the new images of Africa for the spectator. It is in this sense that one says that the African film-maker has replaced the griot in the rewriting of history.

Nyamanton is constructed mostly with long shots. These shots show clearly the space occupied by the women at the house door and Kalifa's father under the tree. The father has to yell when he communicates with women because of the distance separating them. In order to remain within the limits of realism as regards the representation of such spaces, the camera occupies the center between the women and the father, as was the case with the griot in *Ceddo.* Here, too close-ups and shot/reverse-shots are avoided as much as possible.

At first sight, this narrative expedient may be dismissed as simply a primitive use of the camera in an attempt to economize on editing. Thus a hasty comparison with Western cinema might bring one to the conclusion that African films lack action. But an analysis based on the forms of oral tradition will highlight the originality of African film language in *Nyamanton.* First, one can see through an ethnographic insight that the long shots serve better to create the effect of verisimilitude in the narrative. The external space in Africa is less characterized by the display of emotion and closeness between man and woman, and more by a designation of man's

space and woman's space in society. The narrator imitates this reality by using mostly long shots and by describing the emotion of the characters instead of showing it. The griot's influence on the film-maker brings about the fact that subjective shots do not always have the same significance in African cinema as in Western cinema. Close-ups of a child's face or of a pack of cigarettes in *Nyamanton,* for example, are not objects seen by a character but their description by the director/narrator for the spectator. Even the flashforward in the film is a description of the mother coming to an understanding of the situation in which she finds herself. Instead of effacing himself and realizing the story through different characters' narrations, the director in *Nyamanton* always carries the camera on his shoulder, and like the griot, dominates the narrative with his presence. While Western directors often achieve recognition by letting the story tell itself, African directors, like the griots, master their craft by impressing the spectator with their narrative performance. This may be because, with the griots, one achieves fame not by being the author of new texts but by being able to reproduce the best versions of old texts. *Nyamanton* is a new version of such African films in which tradition clashes with modernity, and the popularity of its director lies in the manner in which he describes the most memorable episodes of the clash.

The choice of *Nyamanton* for the title of the film is also interesting in the context of oral tradition. Etymologically, "Nyamanton" comes from the prefix "Nyama" which in Bambara and Mandinka may be translated as "potentially dangerous forces released through the performance or violation of ritual."[10] "Nyaman" with an "n" at the end means trash. Thus a popular song in West Africa likens Sunjata, King of Mali in the thirteenth century, to a dump-site which hides everything underneath itself, but which cannot be covered by other things. Literally the song refers to Sunjata's vital force which protects his people and which harms his enemies like the plague released from a "Nyama" or from the violation of ritual.[11]

When the title of the film is interpreted in the context of "Nyama" as a West African trope, one sees how Sissoko positions the spectator to take a personal responsibility in reducing the children's future to trash collection, and to fear

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the retribution of "Nyama." Sunjata, too, had a difficult childhood, and those who were responsible were punished. On the other hand the likening of the children to Sunjata leads the spectator to identify them with the collective future of Africa. As in *Ceddo,* orality is here again made the subject of the film in order to arraign the repressive forces of tradition and modernism.

Finally, the oral tradition also influenced the French title of the film, *La leçon des ordures (The Lesson of Garbage).* Sissoko wanted to oppose to "The Lesson of Things" which students in Francophone Africa learn every morning from French textbooks the lessons learnt about Malian society by Kalifa and Aliou through their work as garbage boys. As "leçon des choses" becomes interchangeable with "leçon des ordures," and both are little more than "Nyaman," the film creates the necessity to question the lessons inherited from the former colonial powers. There is no doubt that the form of African cinema is influenced by its traditional content. Understanding the role played by the oral tradition in African film enables the critic to see how the film-maker has transformed this tradition into a new ideology. But it is also possible to study the way in which the African content has changed the cinematic language of the West. This is what transpires when one examines the strategies by which film has incorporated African traditions. The African director makes conscious and unconscious references to the griot's narrative techniques.

NOTES

1. Robert Stam and Randal Johnson, *Brazilian Cinema* (East Brunswick: Associated University Press, 1982). Teshome Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*

(Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982). Julianne Burton, *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America: Conversations with Filmmakers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). For the recent debates on Third Cinema see Julianne Burton, "Marginal Cinemas and Mainstream Critical Theory." *Screen* vol. 26, no. 3/4 (1985). Teshome Gabriel, "Colonialism and 'Law and Order' Criticism." *Screen,* vol. 27, no. 3/4 (1986). For an overall review, see Roy Armes, *Third World Filmmaking and the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

2. "Le dit du cinéma africain" in *Films éthnographiques sur l'Afrique Noire,* by Jean Rouch. Paris: UNESCO (1967), pp. 1-9.
3. In *Revue de Littérature Comparée,* vol. 3 no. 4 (1974), p. 537.
4. For a recent discussion of codes tha are specific to film language see Jacques Aumont et al., *Esthétique du film.* Paris: Editions Fernand Nathan (1983), pp. 138-143.
5. Jacques Binet, for example, argues that "The African traditions were not prone to an art of images: no fresco, no painting and no drawing." See "Les cultures africaines et les images" in *CinémAction* no. 26 (1982), (special issue: Cinémas noirs d'Afrique), p. 19.
6. *Revue de Littérature Comparée,* p. 549.
7. Mbye Cham, "Ousmane Sembene and the Aesthetics of African Oral Traditions," in *Africana Journal* (1982), p. 26.
8. In *Technicians of the Sacred,* ed. by Jerome Rothenberg. New York: Anchor Books (1969), pp. 184-191.
9. "Oral Literature and African Film: Narratology in Wend Kuuni." *Présence Africaine* no. 142 (1987), pp. 36-49.
10. Christopher L. Miller, "Orality through Literacy: Mande Verbal Art after the Letter." *The Southern Review,* vol. 23, no. 1 (1987), p. 88.
11. Massa Makan Diabaté, *Le Lion à l'Arc.* Paris: Hatier (1986), p. 77.

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6. Tania Modleski. *Loving with a Vengeance* (New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 34.
7. Modleski, p. 59.
8. Mayne, p. 54.
9. Christian Metz. *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 9.
10. Malkah Notman, et al. "Understanding of Women: Some reconsiderations of autonomy and affiliation," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis,* 1985 April, vol. 14, p. 242.
11. Notman et al., p. 245.

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ROBERT STAMM AND ISMAIL XAVIER

Recent Brazilian Cinema: Allegory/Metacinema/ Carnival

A new generation of Brazilian film-makers is emerging and films like Suzana Amaral's *A Hora da Estrela* (Hour of the Star), Sergio Resende's *O Homen da Capa Preta* (Man in the Black Cape), and Chico Botelho's *Cidade Oculta* (Hidden City) are attracting large popular audiences. Brazilian films are again winning international prizes ("Best Actress" for *Hour of the Star* at Berlin and for *Eu Sei que Vou te Amar* [I Know I'm Going to Love You] at Cannes). A Brazil-based director, Hector Babenco, is directing Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep in a big-budget film in the United States. The Pompidou Center in Paris has mounted a major retrospective featuring more than two hundred films. Two major book-length studies have appeared—Randal Johnson's *Cinema Novo x 5* and Paulo Paraguna's collection *Le Cinéma Brésilien*. So it is perhaps an appropriate moment to review some of the major developments in Brazilian cinema over the last decade and a half.[1]

The first and most obvious point to make about recent Brazilian production is its remarkable and quite unprecedented *diversity*. While it was relatively easy to posit a unifying thread to account for early Cinema Novo—the call for national liberation in general and cinematic decolonization in particular—the present moment offers no such clarity. Brazilian cinema has become a much more dispersed and eclectic phenomenon. Even if one sets aside the soft- and hard-core porn films and the popular childrens' films by *"Os Trapalhoes"* (roughly, the "Four Morons"), one is confronted with a wide spectrum of productions ranging from the work of veteran Cinema Novo directors (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Arnaldo Jabor, Carlos Diegues, Leon Hirszman, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, and Rui Guerra), and of the "sons and daughters" of Cinema Novo (Tizuka Yamasaki, Ana Carolina, Carlos Alberto Prates Correia, Jorge Bodansky, Lauro Escorel, Eduardo Escorel, Bruno and Fabio Barretto), to that of the Underground (Julio Bressane, Rogerio Sganzerla, Andrea Tonacci, Luiz Rosenberg Filho), and the new wave of young film-makers from São Paul (Chico Botelho, Djalma Limongi, Icaro Martins, Jose Antonio Garcia, Sergio Toledo, Wilson Barros, Sergio Bianchi, Carlos Reichenbach), not to mention scores of short fiction films and militant documentaries. Rather than a unifying thread, we can now establish little more than a common substratum of concern, a broad problematic of interrelated questions. Our goal here will not be to cover the entire spectrum (much of which remains unavailable to North American audiences) but rather to emphasize a number of salient trends.

In a recent essay, Fredric Jameson has argued that all Third-World texts are "necessarily allegorical," in that "even those texts invested with an apparently private or libidinal dynamic . . . necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory; the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society."[2] A case could easily be made, in this vein, that Brazilian films, even the most frivolous, have always been allegorical. A number of fifties *chanchadas,* for example, parody successful Hollywood films of the period in terms that allegorize both the "inferiority" of Brazilian cinema in relation to the dominant model and the impulse to transcend a condition imposed by economic dependency. The films of first-phase Cinema Novo, similarly, constitute "allegories of underdevelopment," where history is shown as the unfolding of a progressive teleological design and where an "aesthetic of hunger" turns scarcity itself in a signifier. The avant-garde films of the late sixties and early seventies, for example Rogerio Sganzerla's *Bandido da Luz Ver-*

BANDIDA DE LA LUZ VERMELHA *(Red Light Bandit)*

melha (Red Light Bandit, 1968), meanwhile, become allegorical in another, more modernist sense, as "fragmentary discourses" expressing a "crisis in representation," where the very notion of historical and cinematic teleology becomes suspect.[3] The early sixties metaphor of hunger, evoking the victim finding self-redemption through Fanonian violence, gives way to the late sixties metaphor of an "aesthetic of garbage" as being appropriate to a Third World country picking through the leavings of an international system dominated by First World monopoly capitalism. The diverse strategies we will discuss—metacinema, carnivalization, "*abertura* naturalism," and national allegory—can be seen as responses to a new historical juncture where there is little place for the messianic optimism of early Cinema Novo or the aggressive nihilism of "Marginal Cinema."

The Penchant for Metacinema

Brazilian cinema in the seventies and eighties shows a clear penchant for metacinema and reflexivity. We use these terms here in their broadest possible sense, to refer to films which foreground the film-maker, or the film's intertext, or its textual procedures, or its reception, or its production. One finds reflexivity, to take just a few examples from the most recent crop of films, in *Fulaninha* (What's Her Name, 1986), David Neves's film about a film-maker in love, in *Sonho Sem Fim* (Dream Without End, 1986), Lauro Escorel's film about Brazilian film pioneer Eduardo Abelim, in *Bras Cubas* (1985), Julio Bressane's reflexive adaptation of a Machado de Assis novel, as well as in the self-flaunting MGM-style artifice of Rui Guerra's *Malandro* (1986), the cinematic obsessions and stagey films-within-the-film of *Kiss of the Spider Women* (1985), in the metalinguistic exercises of popular composer Caetano's *Cinema Falado* (Talking Cinema, 1986), in the mixed documentary/fiction modes and film-maker-within-the-film of Tizuka Yamasaki's *Patriamada* (1985) and in the reflexion on documentary processes in Eduardo Coutinho's *Cabra Marcado para Morrer* (Twenty Years After, 1984).

It is as if the film-maker, conscious of working with issues having a long history of formulation in a body of filmic and extra-filmic texts, becomes necessarily reflexive, dialoguing with the received body of belief and methodology, directly or indirectly discussing the cinema within the films. Each film becomes a methodological sample of a possible approach, at once "about" a subject and "about" itself. Here Brazilian cinema is in step, of course, with international cinema, with its ever-increasing tendency to reflexivity, whether modernist (early Godard), Brechtian (late Godard) or post-modernist (Steven Spielberg). But there are also national and continental specificities at work, rooted in the marginal and syncretic nature of the Latin American cultural experience. The Latin American artist/intellectual is almost necessarily bicultural, at once inside and outside, defined as at the margins yet thoroughly penetrated by the center. As the product of cultural and ethnic *mesticaje,* Brazil, especially, forms a veritable palimpsest of diasporas—blacks brought violently from Africa, indigenous peoples made alien in their own land, and immigrants from Europe, Asia and the Middle East (whence the appropriateness of the title of Tizuka Yamasaki's first film, *Gaijin*—Japanese for "stranger"—in stressing the primordial foreignness of all Brazilians). As an (at least) tricultural people, Brazilians tend to be language- and culture-conscious, inhabiting a peculiar realm of irony where words and images are seldom taken at face value.

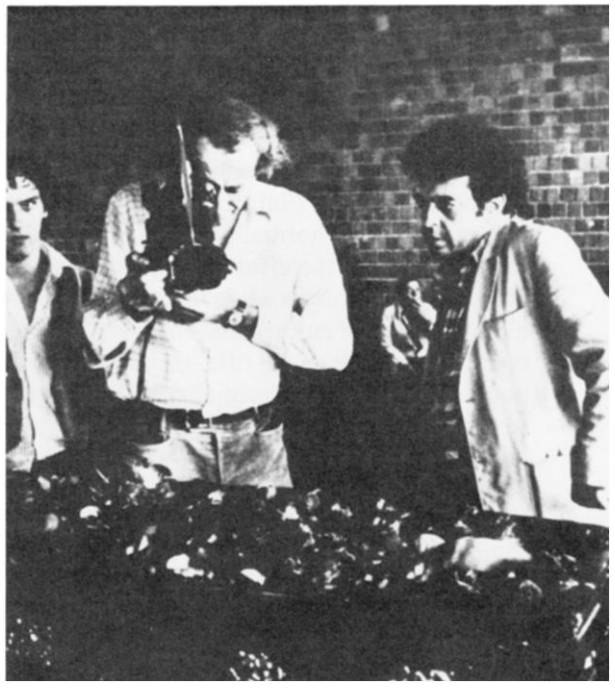
Whatever the root cause of the phenomenon, metacinema is ubiquitous in current Brazilian cinema. But even here we find a remarkable plurality. Among the most commercially oriented films, for example, metacinema takes the form of parodies of Hollywood films or American television programs. These parodies, as João Luiz Vieira points out in his definitive

Hegemony and Resistance: Carnival and Parody in Brazilian Cinema, tend to take as their parodic object Hollywood high-tech spectacles rather than equally popular but less spectacular films such as *Love Story* or *Kramer versus Kramer;* they parody, in other words, precisely those films whose production values Brazilian film-makers could not possibly emulate. Many of the the most successful high-tech Hollywood films of the past fifteen year have attracted the parodic interest of Brazilian cineastes: *Bacalhau* (Codfish, 1976) parodies *Jaws; A Banana Mecanica* (The Mechanical Banana, 1973) parodies *Clockwork Orange; O Jeca contra o Capeta* (The Bumpkin Against the Devil, 1976) parodies *The Exorcist* and so forth. These films can properly be termed allegorical, as Vieira points out, in that they explicitly thematize the relatively weak position of Brazilian Cinema vis-à-vis Hollywood, either by directing laughter against dominant cinema in a kind of aesthetic exorcism or a part of a ritual of self-degradation.[4]

Metacinema is also a constant in the world of São Paulo film-maker Carlos Reichenbach, author, since 1968, of ten features and a number of short films. Reichenbach is well-known in Europe, where he is seen as a "tropical Fassbinder," but only one of his films (*Liliane M*) has been shown in the United States. Because of the foregrounding of eroticism in his work, Reichenbach has often mistakenly been considered a porn director, but the real goal of what João Luiz Vieira calls Reichenbach's "intellectual pornography," is the critique and transvaluation of porn. His first feature, *Corrida em Busca de Amor* (Race for Love, 1971) was a raucous parody of American beach-party films which melded cinematic in-jokes with the anarchistic socialism of Proudhon and Bakunin. Within Reichenbach's meta-pornography, eroticism is always distanced and voyeurism always short-circuited. In his episode for the film *Audacia,* for example, Reichenbach has a love-making couple repeatedly interrupt the "action" to discourse on the role of sexuality in the cinema. The Borgesian *Ilha dos Prazeres Proibidos* (Island of Forbidden Pleasure, 1979), presents its diegesis as a narrative emerging from a cheap erotic novel read by one of the characters. Another character, named Luc Moullet, confesses to having murdered Lemmy Caution in Godard's *Alphaville.* The love scenes, in this meta-pornochanchada, are invariably more comic than titillating, as, for example, when we are shown sun-burned tourists pawing each other a beach picnic while lip-synching Nelson Eddy's "Indian Love Call."[5]

Nor does the documentary escape this meta-cinematic tendency. Glauber Rocha's seminal film *Di* (1977), a documentary homage to the Brazilian painter Di Cavalcanti, had already reflexively mocked the conventional "art documentaries" favored by Brazil's cultural bureaucrats, while Artur Omar's *Triste Tropico* (1974) had pioneered the "fictive documentary," thus anticipating Woody Alien's *Zelig* by more than a decade. In this pseudo-biographical tale about a Brazilian doctor whose voyage into the interior parodies Lévi-Strauss's trip to Brazil, the director deploys documentary "evidence" in order to mock our naive faith in documentaries and their claims.[6] In seventies and eighties films, reflexivity becomes a kind of *political* obligation. Whereas sixties documentarists discoursed confidently about the "other" —worker, Indian, black—from a presumed superior position, seventies documentarists began to doubt their right and capacity to speak "for" the other. The "documentary" films of Artur Omar, in this sense, interrogate the very possibility of the cinema relaying without distortion a cultural experience alien to the film-

Glauber Rocha filming the deceased painter Di Cavalcanti in Di



maker. The title of his *Congo* (1972) seems to promise a conventional treatment of a typical documentary subject of the period—Afro-Brazilian folklore and specifically the Afro-Brazilian dance called "congo" or "congada," yet the film itself offers *no* image referring to the film's ostensible theme. The film's real subject, then, is the impossibility, for the white urban intellectual film-maker, to truly apprehend that which is rural, black, and of the people. Other film-makers, disenchanted with the condescending sociologistic approach, strive for a more dialogical and reciprocal relationship between observer and observed. Thus film-maker Andrea Tonacci, in his work for television, simultaneously registers the encounter of urban white Brazilians with freshly contacted indigenous groups *and* reflects on the recording of that encounter. In his latest films, in fact, he decides not to speak for the Indians but rather simply to share the equipment and let the Indians speak for themselves.

Two recent metacinematic fiction films deal with the role of sound in the cinema. Walter Rogerio's *Voz do Brasil* (Voice of Brazil, 1981)—the title refers to a widely detested official radio program—foregrounds the difficulties of a young film-maker waiting for Embrafilme to finance his script. This drama is intercut with a series of episodes having no intrinsic link to the story except that they have to do with São Paulo film-making. One sequence shows an American television detective series being dubbed in Brazilian Portuguese in a sound studio. As the film loop of an action-packed scene passes on the screen, the dubbing technicians do their work and exchange trivialities. We are struck by the disjunction between the glamorous American stars on the screen and the ordinary Brazilians lending their voices. The provocation of the film, then, is to reveal the hidden face of the normally off-screen dubbers, rendering visible the effaced labor of a particular cinematic process while revealing the technical supports of cultural neocolonialism. The voice, to go back to the title, is that of Brazil, but the images and the mentality and corporate structure behind them are not. Icaro Martins and José Antonio Garcia's *Estrela Nua* (Nude Star, 1985), meanwhile, parlays the issue of post-synchronization into a complex tale of exchanged identities. When the well-known actress Angela dies without having dubbed her last film, the television dubber Gloria is called to lend her voice to the image of the original actress. She delights the film-makers by enacting the role as if truly possessed by the deceased actress's spirit, until they realize that the possession has become quite literal and destructive, as Gloria's life slowly comes to coincide with that of Angela, leading ultimately to her death. *Estrela Nua* proliferates in modish self-referential devices in the post-modernist mode of proxy sensibility, but what is finally most interesting is the film's way of linking the technical question of post-synchronization to larger psychic questions of human identity, transference, and possession.

We find still another kind of metacinema in Rogerio Sganzerla's documentary/fiction feature *Nem Tudo é Verdade* (It's Not All True, 1985), a film which works through Sganzerla's obsession with Orson Welles and specifically with the never-completed *It's All True,* which Welles began filming during Rio's 1942 Carnival and the lost footage of which was recently rediscovered in a Paramount warehouse. *It's Not All True* recreates Welles's Brazilian experience through a sound-image collage, combining documentary-style material (footage from *It's All True,* footage of Welles in Rio, citations of *Citizen Kane* and *The Lady from Shanghai,* newspaper accounts, period photos, interviews with participants in the film) with staged reconstructions in which Brazilian avant-garde musician Arrigo Barnabe (who physically resembles the young Welles) plays Welles himself in his encounters with Brazilian celebrities and studio executives. Sganzerla portrays Welles as the rebellious victim of the Hollywood studio system, the press, and North American and Brazilian politicians. Welles's utopian dream of real industrial and artistic collaboration between North and South America, Sganzerla suggests, violently challenged the neocolonial assumptions of the time.

A number of seventies and eighties films renew contact with the *chanchada*—the Rio-based musical comedies popular from the thirties through the fifties—now seen as the highest symbol of successful communication with the Brazilian public, the fount of a cinema at once nationalist, pragmatic, and popular. The process of revalorization of the *chanchada* began with Tropicalism's aggressive leveling, in the late sixties, of high (erudite) and low (mass)

culture. Tropicalism, as it was expressed in music, theater, and film, provocatively mingled the folkloric and the industrial, the native and the foreign; its favored technique was the collage of disparate discourses, the result of a "cannibalistic" ingestion of the most heterogenous cultural stimuli. The latter-day filmic incorporation of the *chanchada* dates from Sganzerla's *Red Light Bandit* (1968) and Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1969). The socially conscious recycling of *chanchada* strategies and actors enabled *Macunaíma,* especially, to realize a goal long inaccessible to Cinema Novo directors—the reconciliation of political and aesthetic avant-gardism with popular and box-office appeal.

The revalorization of the *chanchada* in the field of criticism and history, meanwhile, was furthered by film historian Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes, who argued, in his essay "Cinema: Trajectory of Underdevelopment," that not only were the *chanchadas* of vital importance for having retained the loyalty of the Brazilian audience, but also that *all* Brazilian films, even the most imitative, remained authentically Brazilian, thanks to the Brazilian "creative *in*capacity for copying."[7] Now that the *chanchada* per se was dead, it becomes history and is therefore available for nostalgic or critical reelaboration, a legitimate urban tradition to be incorporated much as rural folklore was incorporated by Cinema Novo in the early sixties. Within the filmic revitalization of the *chanchada,* we find a wide diversity of trends, for the *chanchada* is at times taken up in a romantic vein, as in Carlos Diegues's *Quando O Carnaval Chegar* (When Carnival Comes, 1972), and at times in a conceptual-reflexive vein, as in Bressane's stylistic exercises, and at still other times in a comic-parodic-erotic vein, as with Ivan Cardoso's *Segredo da Mumia* (Secret of the Mummy, 1982) or *As Sete Vampiras* (The Seven Vampires, 1986). Cardoso favors a genre he himself dubs *"Terrir"*—a play on *"terror"* and *"rir"* (laugh)—which builds on cinematic codes already internalized by the spectator, specifically those of the classical horror film. *The Secret of the Mummy,* for example, synthesizes mock-citations of the horror film—lightning flashes, thunderclaps, sinister castles, torch-lit corridors with references to the American B-film, the Brazilian Underground, and the *chanchada.* (Here we have a kind of parody of parody, since the *chanchada* was already parodic.) In a Brazilianized synthesis of Roger Corman and Mel Brooks, Ivan Cardoso gives new life to the cliches of the genre film, in what João Luiz Vieira calls the "vampirization" of pre-existing films and genres, whereby the new text absorbs and transforms the "blood" of other texts.[8]

The Emblem of Carnival

The symbolic energies of carnival animate countless Brazilian films in the seventies and eighties. But this "recarnivalization" takes variegated form. At times the revolution itself is regarded a kind of carnival, as with Ze Celso's Living-Theatre-like approach to an absurdist Brazilian theatrical classic, Oswald de Andrade's *Rei da Vela* (King of the Candle, written in 1933, filmed in 1985) where the revolution becomes a fete or collective communion. More often, however, the film-makers are less concerned with militancy. They abandon the old puritanical-leftist equation of party/carnival with alienation and escapism, a tendency present, for example, in *Cinco Vezes Favela* (Five Times Favela, 1962) where the popular classes are exhorted to abandon the samba in favor of union militancy, and instead revalorize carnival as an emblem of national identity, a culturally rooted master-trope, the crystallization of a richly syncretic culture which still has a place for an orgiastic ritual at once sacred and profane. Carnival, in these films, is not simply metaphoric. Carnival, and Rio's "samba schools," are a quite literal presence in Walter Lima, Jr.'s *Lira do Delirio* (Delirious Lyre, 1978), Vera Figueredo's *Samba da Criacão do Mundo* (Samba of the Creation of the World, 1979), and Glauber Rocha's *Idade da Terra* (Age of the Earth, 1980). In other cases, carnival forms part of the wider circulation of

LIRA DO DELIRIO *(Delirious Lyre)*

IDADE DE TERRA *(Age of the Earth)*

popular and erudite culture. The stories of Diegues's *Xica da Silva* (1976) and Walter Lima, Jr's *Chico Rei* (1982), for example, were first presented as samba-school pageants for Rio's carnival. Indeed, Diegues has said that he conceived both *Xica da Silva* and *Quilombo* (1984) as "samba enredos" (samba plots) i.e., as analogous in their procedures to the collection of songs, dances, costumes, and lyrics that form part of the popular narrative form called a samba-school presentation. Fernando Cony Campos's *Ladroes de Cinema* (Cinema Thieves, 1977) foregrounds this analogy by having his *favelado* protagonists steal film-making equipment from American tourists visiting Rio for carnival. The *favelados* conceive the film they plan to make with the stolen equipment—about an abortive eighteenth-century revolt against Portuguese colonialism—as a kind of samba school narration.

At times carnival comes to form part of a larger recuperation of popular culture, a constellation of values which includes sensuality, *malandragem* (quick-witted hustling) popular religious practice, and even soccer. Early Cinema Novo films such as *Subterraneos do Futebol* (Subterranean Soccer, 1962) and *Garrincha, Alegria do Povo* (Garrincha, Joy of the People, 1963) tended to denounce soccer as a modern form of "bread and circuses" exploited by the ruling class to divert and demobilize the people. *Garrincha, Alegria do Povo,* for example, pointedly placed the World Cup loss of 1950 *after* the 1962 victory in order to emphasize the ephemeral and ultimately futile nature of such triumphs. Djalma Batista's *Asa Branca, Um Sonho Brasileiro* (White Wing, a Brazilian Dream, 1981), in contrast, sees soccer as a kind of positive energy invested in a creative dream. The film shows the problematic aspects of the soccer-player protagonist's trajectory, revealing the limitations of the dream and the human price paid, but it also offers an uninhibited homage to the festive poetry of athletic contest. Other films emphasize the famous Brazilian *jeitinho* (street-smart transcendence or clever way out of apparently intractable problems) associated with the fast-thinking *melandro* (urban hustler). We find the *malandro* figure in the films of actor-turned-director Hugo Carvana, notably in his *Val Trabalhar, Vagabundo* (Go to Work, You Bum, 1973) and *Se Segura, Malandro* (Cool It, Hustler, 1978), as well as in Rui Guerra's musical comedy, an adaptation of *Beggar's Opera,* entitled *Malandro* (1986).[9]

All these reapproximations with popular culture reflect an attempted identification, on the film-maker's part, with the more perennial features of Brazilian cultural life, a compromise formation which allows for a discussion of the function of the intellectual/film-maker *and* the possibility of assimilation to the people's world view. At its best, this strategy leads to a kind of popular-yet-pedagogic cinema which combines social critique with carnival-style joy. At times, it turns into the complacent affirmation of presumed Brazilian character traits and the Brazilian national style. Real conflicts are elided in favor of the celebration of the "cordiality" of the fun-loving Brazilian. Thus we find the "mythic" resolution of social conflicts, whether through the charm of Dona Flor and her imaginary way of keeping two husbands, or in the sudden terminal shift into parody in the musical-comedy happy end of Jabor's *Eu Te Amo.* At its worst, a superficial view of carnival celebrates the Brazilian capacity for political conciliation, mocked by Glauber Rocha as the historical tendency for the now repentant right to hold hands again with the now well-behaved left, while *"tudo acaba em samba"* (everything ends in the samba). The happy togetherness of the party, in this apolitical version of Bakhtin's subversive carnival, is the utopian horizon of a cinema with one eye on the samba and the other on the box office.

Two young directors, Ana Carolina and Carlos Alberto Prates Correia, emphasize humor and transgression—a quasi-carnivalization without ever reducing their films to calculatedly marketable products. Their work reconciles commercial viability, guaranteed by sensuality, humor, and technical competence, with risk-

Claudia Ohana in MALANDRO

taking and invention. Ana Carolina's first feature *Mar de Rosas* (Sea of Roses, 1977) anatomizes a grotesque family, consisting of squabbling parents and an anarcho-terrorist daughter with whom the film's sympathies obviously lie, all in an atmosphere of surreal banality à la Ionesco. Her second feature, *Das Tripas Coracão* (idiomatically something like Bending over Backwards, 1980) analyzes a girls' school as a site of hypocrisy and sexual repression. The entire film consists of the extension into 100 minutes of film time of a government inspector's dream just before he signs the order to close the school.

The work of Carlos Alberto Prates Correia similarly reconciles the drive for auteurist expression with the constraints of the market. Prates Correia is from the state of Minas Gerais, land of (now exhausted) mineral wealth and the brilliant prose-poetry of Guimaraes Rosa, and his films often translate the peculiar beauty and somewhat archaic social life of the region. *Perdida* (Lost Woman, 1975) traces the trajectory of a country girl who leaves Minas to become a maid and prostitute in the city, registered in a style which fuses the understated frontality of Godard with the laconic flipness of the Brazilian Underground. The title of *Cabaret Mineiro* (Cabaret in Minas, 1980) is taken from a poem by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, and emphasizes the regional aspect of the film, which is set in the area of the old railroad lines, a reminder of the glory days of the region. Around a tale of an elegant adventurer's love for a red-haired beauty, Prates Correia spins a tale of rural fantasies and eroticism. The cineaste acts as a kind of voyeur-stager of an audio-visual mosaic made up of langorous insinuations and interminable lazy afternoons. In *Noites de Sertão* (Sertão Nights, 1984)—here we are symptomatically far from the oppressed northeastern *sertão* of *Vidas Secas* and *Black God, White Devil*—he explores the universe of

MAR DE ROSAS *(Sea of Roses)*

the Minas plantation and its figurations of desire, foregrounding the conflict between patriarchal order and anarchic sexuality, in a filmic "translation" of the spirit of Guimaraes Rosa.

The effort to develop a viable project of national entertainment is now mobilizing a new generation of film-makers who emerged from Cinema Novo and even from Marginal Cinema. This common project has led not only to a qualified return to the notion of spectatorial pleasure, but also to the heightening of technical standards, to more care with scriptwriting and to a dramaturgy and *mise-en-scène* closer to the high production values fostered by Brazilian television, which has now largely replaced Hollywood as the technical superego of Brazilian cinema. We find a less rigid approach to themes—seen by some as a relief from the repression of the orthodox left and its "ideological patrols" (in Carlos Diegues's polemical phrase of the late seventies)—as film-makers demand the right to express their personal fantasies and utopias, whether in accord with the reigning ideological superego or not. Film-makers refuse the "advice" of those who call for greater sociological realism, and assert the right to treat "minor themes" and "local issues," without making large-scale political statements or allegorical totalizations. At times, therefore, they opt to do nothing more than sensitively register the quotidian, whether melancholy as in Luiz Fernando Goulart's *Marina* (1976), lyric as in Carlos Diegues's *Chuvas de Verão* (Summer Showers, 1978), comic as in David Neves's *Muito Prazer* (Glad to Meet You, 1979), or amorous as in Jabor's *Eu Te Amo* (1980) and *Eu Sei Que Vou Te Amar* (1986).

Abertura Naturalism

The convergence, in the eighties, of a more commercially oriented cinema with the moment of political liberalization (*"abertura"*) led to a kind of "*abertura* naturalism" which focused not only on sex and violence but also on the repressed political experience of the two decades of dictatorship. The first tendency led to a proliferation of "explicit sex" films—hard-core exploitation films which made the *pornochanchadas* look positively sentimental and authentically Brazilian in comparison—as well as to the existential-artsy intimist films of Walter Hugo Khoury (e.g., *O Prisoneiro do Sexo* [Prisoner of Sex, 1983], where tortured neurotic males exorcize their erotic obsessions) and to the jet-set eroticism of Neville d'Almeida's *Rio Babilonia* (1984), where the Rio elite and international stars shuttle in sports cars from orgy to orgy, all staged in palatially modernist houses invariably offering dazzling scenic views of Rio de Janeiro. The remembered experience of dictatorship, meanwhile, led to a new genre: detective thrillers focalizing themes related to political repression. Whereas the Cinema Novo-derived films of the seventies dealt with repression and physical violence through allegory, as in Nelson Pereira dos Santos *Um Azyllo Muito Louco* (The Alienist, 1970), or through poeticized grotesquerie, as in Antonio Fontoura's *Rainha Diaba* (Devil Queen, 1974), or through the detached observation typical of the "case study" approach of Eduardo Escorel's *Ato de Violencia* (Act of Violence, 1980) the new films were frankly entertainment-oriented, favoring action-filled plots with "redeeming social value." Hector Babenco's *Lucio Flavio: O Passageiro da Agonia* (Lucia Flavio: Passenger of Agony, 1977) constitutes a particularly effective example of the genre. Babenco risked offending the junta's censors by focusing on a controversial case involving police complicity with Rio's notorious "death squads." The film's rhetoric, meanwhile, systematically opposes the "truth" of cinema to the "lies" of the print and electronic media. Naturalism becomes part of a seductive strategy associating cinematic spectacle with authenticity and even audacity in presenting the raw facts. Babenco's *Pixote* (1980), in the same vein of *abertura* naturalism, follows some Brazilian slum kids, synecdochic samples of that country's three million homeless children, from police round-up to reform school to a hazardous "freedom" on the streets. The first half of the film is set in a microcosmic detention center, a ritualized universe of authoritarian power trips and sordid sexual humiliations. Babenco exposes an array of real abuses by the authorities: exploitation, cover-ups, corruption, even murder. When Pixote and his friends escape, the film metamorphoses generically into a picaresque tale of tragicomic misadventures, filmed in a style of funky Third-World expressionism. Within a calloused milieu, we find epiphanies of tenderness: sexual connections

PIXOTE

made across lines of age, race, and class, along with the merging of the erotic with the lethal. "See if this makes you come," taunt the kids as they poke a revolver in the face of a prostitute's john. Although lacking in political analysis, *Pixote* does expose the abuses of governmental correctional institutions, and achieves, at its best, a convulsive beauty reminiscent of Buñuel's *Los Olvidados.*[10]

Within this same naturalistic line, we also find less competent films where the social analysis is severely compromised by the felt need for traditional formulae: classical dramatic structure, Manichean schemas of heroes and villains, the imperative for constant "action." Such is the case of Oswaldo Caldeira's *O Bom Burgues* (The Good Bourgeois, 1983), based on the story of a wealthy businessman who gave financial and logistical support to the leftist guerillas sought by the junta, as well as of the controversial *Para Frente Brasil* (Forward Brazil, 1983) by veteran film-maker Roberto Farias. Although the film provoked the wrath of the junta (and even triggered the fall of the then head of Embrafilme) by dramatizing the military apparatus of repression and torture, in fact the film is politically ambiguous in seeming to contrast local sadistic torturers with a benign and concerned federal government. Murillo Salles's *Nunca Fomos Tao Felizes* (Never Were We So Happy, 1984), meanwhile, constitutes a more successful example within this tendency, in its story of a clandestine leftist militant forced to hide his own activities even from his own bewildered son. Here the interest is dislocated from the political drama per se to the psychological investigation of the son's isolation and his truncated relationship to a father he cannot understand, as well as the implied complementary dilemma of a father eager to love his son but prevented by political circumstance from doing so fully. Jorge Duran's *A Cor do Seu Destino* (The Color of Your Destiny, 1987), finally, evokes the tormented psyches of Chilean exiles in Brazil, torn between affection for their new homeland and anguished nostalgia for a Chile brutalized by the Pinochet dictatorship.

To the extent to which larger social movements grow in strength the production of documentaries echoes, mediates, and even advances this process. The eighties bring, as a consequence, a strong harvest of feminist, black-liberationist, and workers' films. A feminist perspective animates complex short fiction films such as Ines Castilho's *Histerias* (1983) as well as big-budget historical spectacles such as Tizuka Yamasaki's *Paràiba Mulher Macho* (1985). Homosexual love, meanwhile, is treated sympathetically in such films as Bruno Barretto's *Beijo no Asfalto* (Kiss on the Asphalt, 1985), Sergio Amon's *Aqueles Dois* (Those Two, 1985) and Sergio Toledo's *Vera* (1987). The question of racism and black consciousness, finally, before emerging into the light of prestige productions like *Quilombo* and *Chico Rei,* was touched on by black actor-filmmaker Antonio Pitanga in his *No Boca do Mundo* (In the World's Mouth, 1977), and as a process of the affirmation of Afro-Brazilian culture, in the films of Zozimo Balbul (*Dia de Alforria,* Day of Liberation, 1981), Juana Elbein dos Santos (*Arte Sacra Negra I (Orixa Ninu Ile,* 1978) and *Arte Negra Sacra II (Metamorfose das Maes Nago,* 1979), Roberto Moura (*Sai Dessa, Exu,* 1973), Raquel Gerber (*Yle Xooque,* 1981) and Carlos Blajsblat (*Egungun,* 1982).

While Cinema Novo, despite its revolutionary concerns, had largely ignored the working class, we begin to discern, in the midseventies, the impart of workers' struggles, partly as a result of the immense coming-to-consciousness and political mobilization of the workers in São Paulo culminating in the strikes which paralyzed the city in 1978. This theme too is expressed in a variety of styles and formats. João Batista de Andrade's *O Homen Que Virou Suco* (The Man Who Turned into Juice, 1980) first-prize winner at the Moscow Film Festival, for example, develops a popular narrative tone, mingling humor with pathos in its story about

a worker who also writes *folhetos* (handout fiction). Thus the film treats, on another register, the theme often elaborated in the work of Nelson Pereira dos Santos—the distance between the cultural producer (a projection of the filmmaker himself) and his public.

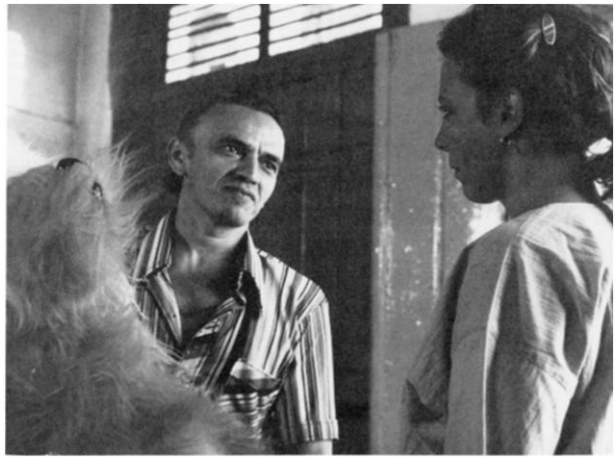
A film which articulates all these themes—strikes, work conditions, political tensions, assassinations—and which received distribution in the United States, was Leon Hirszman's *Eles Nao Usam Black Tie* (They Don't Wear Black Tie, 1981). The film updates the fifties play of the same title by Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, who plays Otavio in the film, and filters it through an aesthetic reminiscent both of Italian neorealism and intensely political early Cinema Novo. Retroactively compensating for Cinema Novo's slighting of the working class—Cinema Novo always seemed to prefer those both lower (the *favelados*) and higher (the elite) on the social ladder—the film offers an impressive gallery of proletarian characters, ranging from the old leftist Otavio through the impatient radical Sartini to the courageous black unionist Braulin to the wavering but never completely despicable son Tião, along with the predictable assortment of scabs and informers. The film weaves a family story, which contrasts the militant father's lucidity with the son's opportunistic confusion, and the story of a strike—supporting, finally, a cautious nonadventurist militancy, disciplined and struggling for small local victories, while condemning the irrational excesses of the overly emotional radicals. Subtextually, the veteran militant film-maker "corrects" the lost generation of the dictatorship, and in this sense distorts history. For in fact, the São Paulo strikes were the product of a new generation typified by Luis Ignacio da Silva (the famous "Lula") and his Workers' Party, rather than of the traditional left. But the realism of *Black Tie* consists, ultimately, in the dynamic of the characters rather than in strictly accurate historical depiction, and in this sense it manages to fuse political consciousness and popular emotion, marshalling the force of feeling in the service of enlightenment.[11]

The perspective on contemporary Brazil is somewhat different in the films of the post-Cinema Novo generation, largely from São Paulo, a generation accustomed to military rule but also initiated into the counter-culture of mind-bending drugs, polymorphous sexuality and anarchistic politics, eager for alternatives in all areas and ready to elaborate a vision of Brazil based on its experience of history. While not a "school" in the sense of Cinema Novo, the young São Paulo film-makers do share certain traits, notably a search to break out of isolation, to return to narrative fiction and the effective construction of audience identification, but without betraying the national culture. The film-makers follow a middle path between the didacticism of Cinema Novo and the provocations of the Underground. Rather than metacinematic deconstruction, the authors propose what Jean-Claude Bernardet calls a "false naturalism," a pseudorealism which shows that it is aware that realism is a lie, a kind of representation which passes itself off as real but constantly de-realizes itself.[12] In this postmodernist cinema, the film-maker eschews grand ambitions in order to avoid grand disappointments, in a cinema which is more modest, more open, and more solicitous of the audience's affection. A finely realized example of this tendency is Chico Botelho's *Cidade Oculta* (Hidden City, 1986). As the title suggests, the city (São Paulo) is virtually the protagonist of the film. The scenario privileges night-time São Paulo, its punk-nihilist subcultures, its Karaoke bars and nightspots. *Cidade Oculta* portrays São Paulo as a synthesis of the world's cities, at times evoking New York, at times Tokyo (much of the film was shot in the Japanese neighborhood called "Liberdade"), and at times West Berlin—a cross, in filmic terms, of *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner*. José Roberto Eliezer's cinematography features

CIDADE OCULTA *(Hidden City)*

canted frames and off-balance *Touch of Evil*-like compositions and a metallically shiny video-game aesthetic. The film's pastiche plot revolves around two-dimensional characters with quasi-allegorical names: the bandits "Angel" (Arrigo Barnabe) and "Jap" (Celo Saiki), the nightclub performer Shirley Shadow (Carla Camurati), in life-and-death struggle with a corrupt policeman named "Big Rat" (Claudio Mamberti). The film plays knowingly with an intertext which includes comic books, cabaret, musical comedy, music video, and *film noir*. *Cidade Oculta* appeals to a younger media-formed generation of Brazilians for whom Cinema Novo-style didacticism is largely irrelevant. Yet the film does not completely abandon social consciousness, which here takes the form of the satirical portrayal of the policeman, presented by the media as a heroic anti-drug fighters, but in fact a drug addict and mafioso. The sound track is propelled by the avant-gardist music of Arrigo Barnabe, a syncretic music which mingles the influence of samba, rock, jazz, and Stockhausen, Schoenberg, Bartok and *musique concrete,* and which forms a perfect musical analogue to the hyper-modern feeling of the story and images.

Another São Paulo film, Suzana Amaral's *A Hora de Estrela* (Hour of the Star 1985), garnered many international awards as well as enthusiastic reviews after its recent opening in New York. A rare Brazilian graduate of a North American film school (NYU, where her class-mates included Jim Jarmusch and Susan Seidelman), Amaral in some ways fits into the new era of film-making, both in the sense of her film's modest subject—the misadventures of an awkward, uneducated, virginal girl from the Northeast in the concrete jungle of São Paulo—and in its pseudonaturalist manner which melds a documentary flavor with the feeling of fable. The film discards the reflexive structure of the Clarice Lispector source novella—by which a sophisticated upper-class male narrator grapples with the problem of bringing to life a simple-hearted lower-class character—in favor of an unmediated third-person approach to its theme. The result is a kind of updated neorealism, but this time without neorealism's frequent lapses into melodrama. The film's protagonist, Macabea, can be seen as the latter-day descendent of the unglamorous and barely articulate characters of



A Hora de Estrela *(Hour of the Star)*

certain first-phase Cinema Novo films, for example the peasant Fabiano in *Vidas Secas*. Her character is constructed by an array of sharply observed details: her modest way of undressing *under* the bedcovers, her way of wiping her nose on her blouse collar, her nibbling on fried chicken as she urinates into a wash basin, her passion for guava and cheese, her vain chewing of aspirins as a cure for spiritual malaise. Where the film differs from Cinema Novo is in its relative conventionality of technique (psychologized narration, shot/counter shot for dialogue), its refusal of all social allegory (Macabea exhibits not a trace of class-consciousness or incipient rebellion), and finally in its readiness to grant its central character a fantasy life, even if a truncated one. What the film achieves, finally, is an honest, often humorous lucidity within its self-defined limits.

The Latter-Day Allegories of Cinema Novo

Cinema Novo has been relentlessly allegorical since its first films in the early sixties in the sense that it has always favored the filmic treatment of microcosmic situations which evoke Brazil as a whole, developing a fragmentary discourse to insinuate coded political messages. We find allegory, for example, in the millenial Marxism of Rocha's *Deus e Diablo na Terra do Sol* (Black God, White Devil, 1964), in the synthetic political figures (*the* populist, *the* fascist, *the* leftist intellectual) of *Terra em Transe* (Land in Anguish, 1967), as well as in the "cannibalist" fables of *Macunaíma* and *Como Era Gostoso meu Frances* (How Tasty was my Frenchman, 1971). This allegorical tendency became exacerbated during the period of extreme political repression in the early seventies. Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, in *Os incon-*

fidentes (The Conspirators, 1972), for example, discussed the defeat of the left in contemporary Brazil by displacing current issues onto the events of another century, specifically the abortive eighteenth-century revolt against Portuguese colonialism. Leon Hirszman's *São Bernardo* (1973), meanwhile, adopted a literary classic set in the twenties to allegorize the fascism of the sixties and seventies, via a protagonist who, not unlike Brazil's military leaders of the period, comes to power through bribery and murder, and who, again like the regime, enriches himself at the expense of the majority.

Any number of seventies and eighties films by Cinema Novo veterans offer a globalizing vision of society as expressed in allegories of underdevelopment and modernization. Both Guerra/Xavier's *The Fall* (1978) and Jabor's *Tudo Bem* (Everything's Fine, 1977), for example, elaborate the metaphor of "construction" to make a general statement about Brazilian modernization. *The Fall's* story about hard-hat construction workers building Rio's subway system is made to speak more generally about the overall movement of Brazilian society in the era of a consumerist model of development, national integration via satellite transmission, huge foreign debt, and the restructuration of urban space wrought by advanced capitalist development. The same metaphor underlies the allegorical *Tudo Bem,* in which a bourgeois couple invites construction workers to remodel their Carioca apartment. As the construction workers and maids take over the apartment—the "slave quarters," in Glauber Rocha's felicitous phrase, "invade the Big House"—the apartment becomes a symbolic microcosm, the site of interaction of opposing class discourses and interests.

TUDO BEM *(Everything's Fine)*

Carlos Diegues's *Bye Bye Brazil* (1980) creates a kind of picaresque allegory in which the "Caravana Rolidei"—a motley troupe of ambulatory artists—wanders around Brazil to witness, not without melancholy, the advance of modernization heralded by a national television which flattens regional diversity and renders obsolescent the troupe's old-fashioned entertainment. Here the social contradictions compressed into a single apartment in *Tudo Bem* are anamorphically splayed out over the wide screen of the Amazon basin. Alongside its self-flauntingly theatrical core fiction, *Bye Bye Brazil* presents a kind of seismological documentary that registers the aftershocks of the "multinationalization" of the Brazilian subcontinent. *Bye Bye Brazil* (whose original title was also in English) provides visual confirmation of the Americanization pointed out in the lyrics of the title song: pinball machines in the jungle, Indian chiefs sporting designer jeans, backlands bands that sound like the Bee Gees. The central concerns (what is the current state of Brazil? What is popular culture? What is cultural colonialism? What is the relation between artist and public?) were largely inherited from earlier stages of Cinema Nono; what is new is only the lightness and humor with which the old themes are sounded.[13]

The metaphor of civil construction, familiar from *Tudo Bem* and *A Queda,* reappears in Glauber Rocha's *Idade da Terra* (1980), but this time in the Biblical image of the people exploited by Pharoahs in the edification of tombs. At the same time, the film emphasizes the immensity of the country, developing a geographical trope of capital importance in recent Brazilian cinema, suggesting that the present phase of its imaginary and its reflexion involves the exploration of new frontiers, and a desire to verify *in loco* the actual effects of third world capitalism in the service of national integration, a preoccupation present not only in *Idade da Terra, Bye Bye Brazil,* and *Iracema,* but also in a number of first features by young directors, as in the case of Raulino's *Noites Paraguaios* (Paraguayan Nights (1981), Geraldo Morais's *A Dificil Viagem* (The Difficult Journey, 1982) and Augusto Seva's *A Caminho das Indias* (On the Road to the Indies, 1982). This reaching out to the frontiers represents a historic return to

one feature of the early Cinema Novo films. When Brazilian cinema wants to speak for Brazil as a whole, when it wants to speak of national identity, it continues to reach beyond the urban centers, where the film-makers live and work, to the strength and density of the "other Brazil": the Northeast, the Amazon, the vast Brazil far from the wealthy and Europeanized South. When it wishes to speak of modernization as a global process, Brazilian cinema observes that process at its frontier points, at the very edges of the national experience, and even when it immerses itself in the city, it is to encounter the traces of the margins in the center, whether in the form of migrants from that other Brazil—thus we re-encounter the archaic within the modern—or in the form of the Northeasterners and obscure religious practices that invade the apartment of *Tudo Bem,* or the immigrant workers who build the subway in *A Queda.* In the hillbilly singers Ze Rico and Milionario who star in Nelson Pereira dos Santos's *Estrada da Vida* (Road of Life, 1980) or the immigrants, soccer players, and prostitutes in countless films made in São Paulo.

At times the director finds the "other Brazil" in the historic past, as in Carlos Diegues's *Quilombo* (1984). Here Diegues returns to the theme of his first feature *Ganga Zumba* (1963)—black resistance against slavery. Both films celebrate the historical reality of Palmares, the most spectacular and long-lived of the free communities, or *quilombos,* founded by runaway slaves. A didactic saga based on fact, legend, and imaginative extrapolation, the film moves somewhat uneasily between historical reconstruction and musical comedy. What marks the film as sharing in the allegorical tendency is its desire to present Palmares, the first truly democratic and multiracial society in the western hemisphere, as a model for contemporary Brazil. One senses in *Quilombo* a nostalgic utopianism combined with a disenchantment with occidental political models, including a Marxism often guilty of a certain ethnocentrism. *Quilombo,* in this sense, treats a political dream which existed until it was destroyed by colonial violence, but whose memory can still nourish.

Quilombo is not the only latter-day Cinema Novo film to bring to fruition a project first conceived in the late fifties or early sixties. Such is the case as well of Hirszman's *They Don't Wear Black Tie,* Eduard Coutinho's *Carbra Marcado para Morrer* and Nelson Pereira dos Santos's *Memorias de Carcere* (Prison Memories). This last film, which is based on the prison memoirs of Brazilian novelist Graciliano Ramos, charts Ramos's descent, in the late thirties, into the hell of the prisons of populist dictator Getulio Vargas. But simultaneous with this descent, the film displays a very different movement. With each successive attempt at systematic dehumanization, Ramos gains character and humanity through resistance. He becomes a more committed human being at the

QUILOMBO *by Carlos Diegues*

same time that he comes to appreciate his vocation as a writer. Within the abject promiscuity of the prison, he discovers what separated him, the progressive bourgeois intellectual, from the people. The Third World gulag becomes, for him, the scene of a purificatory rite. All the dramatic situations of the film are arranged around a central crescendo—the writer's increasing participation in the life of the prison and the prisoners' increasing collaboration in the work of the writer. The climax comes with the collective defense of the manuscript, now become a group patrimony. The film allegorizes the author's vision of the role of the progressive artist, whose "witness" turns the common experience into remembered history, and thus offers a ringing endorsement of the vocation of literature—and by analogy, the cinema—as a critical register of social existence.

Prison Memories is allegorical in still another sense, in that it uses one set of events, which transpired in the thirties, to speak about another set of events. Just as the "joke" in *Vidas Secas* consists in its being set in the past, yet nothing has changed, so *Prison Memories* has everything to do with the Brazil of *abertura.* The prison's "Freedom Radio" speaks of debts and bankers' agreements, and a soldier tells the writer, in a transparent allusion to two decades of military rule, "It will take you civilians a good while to get rid of us." The eagerness of the prisoners to come to decisions by vote evokes, for the Brazilian, the energetic 1984 campaign for direct presidential elections. The film begins and ends with the Brazilian national anthem, at a time when patriotism was back in style in Brazil, precisely because of redemocratization. The anthem marks the film as a microcosmic statement, suggesting that Brazil has the aspect of a prison, yet one whose prisoners will soon be freed.

Another key trope in the cinema of the past two decades has been the highway. The early sixties films—*Vidas Secas, Viramundo, Grande Cidade*—were already fascinated by the theme of internal migration from the impoverished interior. Rui Guerra's *The Guns,* for example, was structured around the opposition between the urban world of weapons and trucks and the rural world of hunger and millenial religion, in a film which counterposed a documentary style, for the peasants, with a narrative fiction linked to the urban characters, with whom we identify

IRACEMA

as the "colonizers" of the rural world. Over a decade later, in Bodansky/Senna's *Iracema* (1975), the story of a poor Indian girl (her name is an anagram on "America" and an allusion to a romantic nineteenth-century Indianist novel) we find a similar confrontation, again relayed by counterposed cinematic techniques. In this allegory of reflexive modernization, the confrontation crystallizes around the relation between the jingoistic truck driver Tião Brasil Grande (Big Brazil Sebastian) played by the actor Paulo Cesar Pereiro, and Iracema, the Indian girl played by the non-professional Edna di Cassia. Within this assymetrical couple, Tião is active agent, initiator, entrepreneur; Iracema is acted upon, prostitute, commodity. Tião is associated with the pet project of the dictatorship, the Transamazonian Highway, and the modernizing nationalism it represents. He embodies the arrogant spirit of the "economic miracle" and the ill-advised Pharonic ambitions which led to a $100-billion debt. The film develops a structural contrast between two filmic

approaches: first, that of cinema reportage with hand-held camera, registering the ecological devastation and human exploitation in the Amazon, and second, that of fictional and allegorical procedures involving the relationship of Tião and Iracema. In a total interpenetration of documentary and fiction (the actor Pereio pretends to be a truck driver around people who do not know him to be an actor) the film understatedly denounces the human toll of frontier "development."

Above: CABRA MARCADO PARA MORRER—*Elizabete in 1964. Below: Elizabete in 1984.*

Return to the Future: Twenty Years After

We may end our discussion of recent Brazilian cinema with a film which self-consciously reflects on the history of that cinema and which recapitulates many of the themes we have been developing. Eduardo Coutinho's reflexive documentary *Cabra Marcado para Morrer*—literally "Man Marked for Death," but translated into English as "Twenty Years After"—traces the historical trajectory of Brazil, and of Brazilian cinema, from the early sixties through 1984, the date of the film's release. Coutinho's initial project, conceived in the optimistic left-populist years before the 1964 coup d'état, was to dramatically reconstruct the real-life political assassination, in 1962, of the peasant leader João Pedro Teixeira. The performers were to be João Pedro's comrades in work and struggle, the locale would be the actual site of the crime, and among the "actors" would be the deceased leader's widow. The coup d'état interrupted the filming, however; the film-makers and peasant participants were dispersed and the material already shot was hidden. Almost two decades later, encouraged by the political liberalization of the eighties, the film-maker sought out the hidden footage and the original "performers." In the present-day film, we watch the participants in the original film watching themselves in the 1964 film, bearing witness not only to the scars left by dictatorship but also to the continuity of popular struggle.

A key figure in *Twenty Years After* is João Pedro's widow, Elizabete, who carried on her husband's militancy, leading demonstrations and even travelling to Brazilia to denounce his assassination. The film-maker discovers her living in another state, under another name, more or less cut off from former friends and much of her family—all necessary, as she explains, "in order not to be exterminated." After suffering extreme oppression, she is bruised but also resilient and even cautiously militant. With the film-maker's help she re-encounters her family, reassumes her true name and reaffirms her political convictions. In her capacity for disappearing, surviving, and then reappearing, she resembles, as Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz points out, the film-maker himself. The emotion generated by the film arises from the encounter of a committed film-maker with an authentic popular heroine, who, despite everything, manages to connect the dots of her political trajectory, just as the film-maker connects the dots of his cinematic project. In the renewed confluence of political cinema and popular struggle, both cineaste and peasant leader resume their struggle and mark their solidarity.

In *Cabra Marcado para Morrer,* the vastness of Brazil is defined by the space of an exemplary diaspora; the dispersion and disintegration of the family and the erasing of identity by repression. But the descent into hell is doubled by a reverse journey which leads, if not to paradise, at least to a historical situation where

questions can be posed again. Here, the cinema literally intervenes in the life of the oppressed, and the story of the film begun, interrupted, and now completed is mingled with the story of those with whom the film-maker dialogues. It is thanks to the filmic meeting between the film-maker and Elizabete that she emerges from the underground and recomposes her identity. Between *Cabra* 1964 and *Cabra* 1984, the same questions remain relevant—repression, squatter's rights, agrarian reform, unionization—but not in the same terms, just as the film is taken up again but in a different mode. The sixties meeting with the widow is paralleled by the highly didactic cinema of the staged sixties film—a mélange of *Salt of the Earth*-style realism, with hortatory dialogue and idealizing low-angles, and the heroicized image of the People promoted by the leftist Center of Popular Culture which sponsored the film. The eighties meeting with the widow takes place in the era of network television and the accumulated experience of the Brazilian documentary. The filmic language is more dialogical, less inclined to discourse omnisciently *about* the other, and more inclined to listen *to* and learn *from* the other. The film incorporates into its own process and editing the recuperation of identity. It adroitly articulates the procedures of the traditional documentary—and especially offscreen commentary—with more contemporary direct-cinema techniques—where we discern the presence of the television professional, Eduardo Coutinho, from the well-known network series "Globo Reporter." We see his crew working within the frame, making us acutely aware of a film-in-the-process-of-being-made before our eyes. We have here, then, a summa of our themes: documentary report, metacinema, the voice of the other, intertextuality (here in the most literal sense), and the impact of history, in a synthesis at once political, social, anthropological, and filmic.

NOTES

1. See Randal Johnson, *Cinema Novo x 5: Masters of Contemporary Brazilian Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984) and *Le Cinema Bresilien,* ed. Paulo Antonio Paranagua (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1987).
2. See Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986).
3. These concepts are elaborated in Ismail Xavier, *Allegories of Underdevelopment: From the Aesthetics of Hunger to the Aesthetics of Garbage* (NYU dissertation, 1982), available through University Microfilms.
4. See João Luiz Vieira, *Hegemony and Resistance: Parody and Carnival in Brazilian Cinema* (NYU) dissertation, 1982).
5. For an informed and illuminating overview of Reichenbach's work, see João Luiz Vieira, "Reber with a Cause: The Films of Carlos Reichenbach, Jr," forthcoming in *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture.*
6. For a detailed analysis of the Rocha film, see Randal Johnson, *Cinema Novo x 5,* pp. 152–155; for analyses of *Triste Tropico,* see Ismail Xavier, *Allegories of Underdevelopment* and Robert Stam, "On the Margins: Brazilian Avant-Garde Cinema," in Randal Johnson and Robert Stam, *Brazilian Cinema* (East Brunswick: Associated University Presses, 1982)
7. See Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes, "Cinema: A Trajectory within Underdevelopment," in Randal Johnson and Robert Stam, *Brazilian Cinema* (East Brunswick: Associated University Presses, 1982).
8. See João Luiz Vieira, "As Sete Vampiras: Transilvania Follies," *Caderno de Critica* No. 2, Rio de Janeiro (November 1986).
9. The path which leads from Rui Guerra's *Os Fuzis* (The Guns, 1964) to *Malandro* exemplies the trajectory of a number of Cinema Novo directors from anti-Hollywood aggressivity to a qualified return to the notion of spectatorial pleasure. While *Os Fuzis* features an austere sound track with virtually no diegetic or commentative music, *Malandro* features a lush musical comedy score. While the earlier film was shot vérité-style *in loco,* the latter film was shot within stylized studio decors. And while the earlier film showed hostility to the dominant model, *Malandro* reveals a kind of affection for the Hollywood film.
10. For a more detailed discussion of *Pixote,* see Robert Stam, *"Pixote"* in *Cineaste,* Vol. XII, No. 3 (1983).
11. For an interview with Leon Hirszman about *Black Tie,* see "Recovering Popular Emotion: An Interview with Leon Hirszman," in *Cineaste,* Vol. XII, No. 2 (1984).
12. See Jean-Claude Bernardet, "Os Jovens Paulistas," in Ismail Xavier, Jean-Claude Bernardet, Miguel Pereira, *O Desafio do Cinema* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1985).
13. For a more detailed analysis of *Bye Bye Brazil,* see Randal Johnson, *Cinema Novo x 5* (Austin: University of Texas Press 1984), pp. 83–90, and Robert Stam, *"Bye Bye Brazil," Cineaste* Vol. XI, No. 1 (Winter 1980–81).

SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE—POLISH STYLE

The "newest artistic project" of MTV director Zbigniew Rybczynski, a Polish exile who is almost as famous among his fans as Madonna, is called *Steps.* A press release announces that it is based on the famous "Odessa Steps" sequence from Sergei Eisenstein's classic film *Potemkin,* and "unites the contemporary elements of modern video with the original films' [sic] dramatic footage." The release goes on, "*Steps* features a middle-American tour group—portrayed in color—which pays a seemingly uneventful visit to the ominous black and white Odessa steps. Suddenly in a blaze of gunfire, the tourists find themselves thrust in the midst of a massacre of men, women and children by the Cossacks. Fortunately, casualties are limited to the Russian peasants in the black and white footage as the colorful world of the tourists, created by video technology, is integrated into the black and white world of the soldiers and peasants. The tourists are seen taking snapshots of dead bodies for their photo albums, then taking time out to eat ice cream with the soldiers. Contemporary views of truth and morality are thrown into sharp relief as this historic social revolution is viewed as just another staged spectacle on their tour itinerary."

Reviews

AFTER HOURS

Director: Martin Scorsese. Script: Joseph Minion. Photography: Michael Ballhaus. Producers: Amy Robinson, Griffin Dunne, Robert F. Colesberry. Music: Howard Shore. Warners.

Griffin Dunne in AFTER HOURS

The expiating fires of our hellish modern world have been a central concern throughout Martin Scorsese's career. A searing, self-immolating view of life has infused his characters as they search for salvation in a nightmarish contemporary landscape. In two of his films, *Taxi Driver* and *Mean Streets,* this trial-by-fire aspect becomes literalized as the central character actually holds his hand over a flame until the flesh begins to burn. *After Hours* continues this cauterizing outlook, but with a wicked sense of black comedy. In fact, this sense of humor, along with a tight narrative structure, is what separates *After Hours* from most of Scorsese's other films.

The film is an account of one night in the life of Paul Hackett (Griffin Dunne), a young word processor who lives alone in New York. Because of a chance encounter with the sexy young Marcy (Rosanna Arquette), Paul taxis down to SoHo for what he hopes will be an evening of casual pleasure. Instead, he is thrust into a comic nightmare. After a series of weird events, he is chased through the streets by a vigilante mob who have mistaken him for a burglar. Eventually, he is able to escape the farcically demonic forces of nighttime SoHo, but we can only assume that the experience has transformed him in ways that will forever alter his outlook on life.

Structurally, *After Hours* is more concise than most of Scorsese's other work. Its time span takes in only about 8 hours, and there is a more conscious approach to the use of symbols. On the whole, this is attributable to a clever script. Written by 26-year-old Joseph Minion, *After Hours* is a comic concoction that intermittently resembles *The Odyssey, The Inferno, Candide, Tropic of Cancer, The Wizard of Oz,* and *Mad Magazine*—among others. Like the protagonists in some of these works, Paul Hackett embarks on a journey, albeit a comic one, in which he encounters hardship and death before finding his way back home. In the absurdist world created by Minion and Scorsese, the existentially guilty Paul wanders through an urban phantasmagoria that resembles his own psychic terrain. *After Hours* is a rite-of-passage fable about sex and death.

Sitting zombie-like before his office computer, Paul is a cipher in a sea of numbers. Venturing home to his apartment, standing mute in his white suit, he seems to disappear into the white-on-white interior. In this advanced state of entropy and alienation he lies down on the couch to watch TV. The literal-minded might conclude that at this point he fell asleep and dreamed the rest of the movie, but whether dream or urban myth it is a story pickled in the juice of Henry Miller. We see a close-up of Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* as the camera tracks back fast to reveal Paul reading by himself in an all-night coffee shop. And in many respects *After Hours* is a kind of satiric elaboration upon *Tropic of Cancer.* Of course, there are a number of differences between the two in plot, character, and structure. *After Hours* does not have the raw sensuality of image that *Tropic* has, and seems to parody rather than mimic *Tropic's* sexual escapades. Nevertheless, it has the same dark undertone, the same sense of urban anarchy, and the same black and biting wit. As in the *Tropic* books, there are lurid, almost surreal scenes of after-hour activities in the murky labyrinths of the city. Paul lives alone in his clean, lifeless apartment; in *Tropic of Cancer* Miller lives in the immaculately clean Villa Borghese, where "We are all alone and we are dead." Paul works a boring job as a word

processor; Miller works a boring job as a proofreader, and both are oppressed with the accumulation of sheer facts. Like Paul, Miller meets strange souls in the city's depths. The whores and chiselers come and go while people vomit in the streets; ugliness and laughter mix in a Rabelaisian brew as the narrator searches for the key to life's mystery.

Miller's work, like much of modern literature, is an apocalyptic vision of Western civilization. Miller felt that materialistic society had created a false reality: a sterile world that worships reason as it accumulates inventories. Only by crashing through this reality and destroying the old self, he felt, could we bring about transcendence or rebirth. Thus, he presents an obscene world swirling in chaos—a world that needs to be destroyed so that a new world of cosmic consciousness can be born. To Miller, obscenity is a rite of purification, a way of cleansing our sensibilities by destroying our impulse to conform. To Scorsese, only a trial by fire (in one form or another) will burn away the old self, purifying us of guilt and alienation. Arriving from different directions, both men share a belief in creative destruction.

The point of entry in this process of destruction occurs when we open the floodgates of our subconscious minds and confront the dark, swirling forces that reside within—the demons of our other selves and the black knight of death. Paul's sojourn into the dark environs of SoHo symbolically represents this journey into the unconscious. This, of course, is far from being a new idea. Much of modern literature concerns itself with the unconscious, while even classics such as *The Odyssey* or *The Inferno* explored the soul of man with paradigmic journeys into the pit. What makes *After Hours* original is how it exploits the comic potential in this theme. We laugh even as we shudder as the Dantesque images of hell are filtered through a Milleresque patina of black comedy.

There is no mistaking the idea that Paul is in some kind of urban hell. The glowering cab driver who takes Paul into the SoHo netherworld reminds us of Charon, the ill-tempered ferryman at the River Styx, while the huge bouncer blocking the entrance to the Club Berlin is like Cerberus, the mythic guardian at the gates of Hades. The Club Berlin, a raucous punk bar in the bowels of SoHo, is perhaps the symbolic pit of hell itself, or, if you prefer, the darkest corner of the unconscious. The nightmarish punk revelers strike us as the souls of the damned. One of them is the sculptress, Kiki (Linda Fiorentino), Marcy's kinky roommate. Dressed in black and purring in her mannish voice, she exudes an aura of mystery and power —a kind of punk Hecate, mistress of the night. Paul, who is massaging her, relates a story of early childhood trauma about being locked overnight in a hospital burn ward with some hideously scarred victims. This hellish vignette is the first of many images of burning and mutilation that become prominent in the film.

In *After Hours,* in fact, all sexuality becomes associated with searing pain or death. Whenever Paul attempts a seduction or is even near the bedroom of an eligible female, some grotesque threat springs forth. With Kiki, it is her vivid description of horrible body scars; with Marcy, it is the awful burns on her upper thighs and her ghastly bedside book of burn victims. Julie (Teri Garr) has a bizarre fortress of rat traps surrounding her bed, while Gail (Catherine O'Hara) would like to seduce Paul after she burns off some newspaper that is stuck to his arm. This litany of pain-related sex is compounded by other scenes which depict a nightmarish view of eroticism. While Paul peers voyeuristically through a window, a woman repeatedly shoots her husband as he prepares to go to bed with her. Later, as Paul urinates in the bar bathroom, he spots a graffiti drawing of a shark devouring a man's erect penis. Added to all of this is the element of homosexuality which further disorients Paul. After leaving the aptly named Terminal Bar with its nuzzling gay lovers, he is pursued by a vigilante mob composed largely of homosexuals. Dovetailing over the bar scene, it becomes a kind of symbolic illustration of extreme homosexual panic.

"The neurotic anxiety has its origin in the sexual life. . . . the fear of death is to be regarded as an analogue of the fear of castration," said Sigmund Freud. On this singularly "terrible night," Paul has come to connect all sexuality with anxiety and death. All of his unpleasant encounters with women, the shooting, the homosexual mob . . . all are representations of Paul's deepest fears about sex. When we were first introduced to Paul we found a young man fast approaching 30 and living alone —no girl. Although we can assume a certain amount of intermittent sex, the possibility exists

that Paul has a deep-seated fear of sexual contact or emotional involvement, and seeks the gratification of vicarious sex provided for him in the pages of Henry Miller. To someone such as Paul, the touch of a woman's soul may feel like the cold hands of death. Psychologists suggest that everyone may feel this to some degree; in the climactic moment of sex a portion of the ego dissolves away. In sex we give up ourselves; as Miller said: "In the riddle of sex man comes closest to tasting the full savor of death." The imagery of burning and pain that become associated with sex in *After Hours* are more than a Dantesque version of retribution. To Scorsese as well as Miller, we must burn away all of our false ideas about ourselves until we arrive at our essence, and pain is the price we pay for transcendence. Paul's terrible night in his apprehension of the fires of the unconscious. He is being put through an initiation ritual, a trial by fire for the old self so that a new, more mature one can take its place. Carl Jung described the rite of passage as an archetypal descent into hell followed by renewal—to him this death and rebirth aspect represented the disintegration and reorganization of the psyche.

In *After Hours* the image of death hangs heavy. Marcy, the Miller-quoting nymph, kills herself in despondency and afterwards we see a variety of skulls and death's heads used as ornamentation (tatoos, key chains, ash trays, belt buckles). In fact, the punk girl who hands Paul the party invitation looks like the apparition of death itself. The motif of the ticking clock that accompanies Paul's activities perhaps underscores this best by intimating mortality. To Miller, the acceptance of death, along with the female principle (Thanatos and Eros), are the most important steps in bringing about unity. The female principle, or anima, is the female aspect of the male psyche. In its most fundamental form the anima is the mother, the archetypal model of all that is female. In "The Time of the Assassins," Miller says: "All this has but one meaning for me—that one is still bound to the mother. . . . [men] must come to terms with the mother before they can rid themselves of the obsessions of fetters." Sitting alone in the Club Berlin in the darkest hours of the night is June (Verna Bloom), a woman in her late forties or early fifties. ("June" may be a reference to June Smith, Miller's second wife.) Paul, who has been running from the mob and calling out "Mom! Mom!" now arrives at the club and finds June the only customer there. He asks the bartender who she is. "Oh, that's June. She's always here . . . usually nobody notices her." Paul's meeting with June is a date with destiny, something he has been headed for all night on this symbolic free-fall into the unconscious. She is the figurative mother in this dream story, the negative anima that he must free himself from in order to arrive at a more mature sexual identity and become an adult.

Paul, living alone in a regressive, somewhat asexual world that resembles childhood, is a prisoner to his past—a case of arrested development. The madly pursuing ice cream truck is a symbol of a traumatic childhood that is tied up with the mother. To one degree or another all men are tied with psychic umbilical cords to the mother who, like June, goes unnoticed even though she's ever-present, determining behavior and controlling events. Earlier, we had seen Kiki at work on a humanoid sculpture which resembled Münch's painting "The Scream," a nightmarish vision of modern angst. Scorsese had framed all of Paul and Kiki's scenes so that the sculpture seemed to be a reflection of his anxiety about her intimidating sexuality. Throughout the night he has become more and more identified with this sculpture and at the end he actually turns into it. June entombs (or enwombs) him in a newspaper collage which, like Kiki's sculpture, is an objective correlative of a frozen libido. Paul desperately needs to smash his past in order to escape his limitations. Trapped inside his sculpture/prison, he crashes to the ground after the thieves steal him. His shell now broken, he rises allegorically like some urban phoenix from the ashes of his old mold to be reborn as the person he needed to become. As he rises from the dead, white dust clinging to him like spooky afterbirth, the company bells clang, sounding like some kind of cosmic alarm clock waking him from a long sleep of prolonged childhood.

The rite of passage is a punishment ritual in which pain must be endured so that growth and transcendence may occur. Through the confluence of the talents of Scorsese and Minion, this theme has been molded into an urban fable of wit and intelligence. They have touched an area nearly beyond their conscious control and have connected with the audience's inarticulate and hidden fears. This may be why the film got

such an unsure reception. Howard Shore's haunting music underlines these fears and, as we watch with Paul, we feel the dwindling ticks on our own mortal clocks as fate deals us our only hand. —BILL VAN DAALEN

HALF OF HEAVEN

(La Mitad del Cielo) Director: Manuel Gutiérrez Aragon. Producer: Luis Megino. Script: Guitiérrez Aragon and Megino. Cinematography: José Luis Alcaine. Music: Milladoiro. Skouras Pictures.

Half of Heaven is a remarkable film by one of Spain's most talented director-screenwriters. Although not as well known in this country as his compatriots Luis Buñuel or Carlos Saura, Gutiérrez Aragon has been making films for the past fifteen years, and winning numerous prizes at film festivals. (*Half of Heaven* won the grand prize at San Sebastián in 1986.)

Born in 1942, Gutiérrez Aragon belongs to the generation of Spanish film-makers born after the Civil War who came of age in the 1960s—when Spain was transformed from a predominantly rural backwater to an industrialized, urbanized European country. During that period, Gutiérrez Aragon attended the prestigious Escuela Oficial del Cine, where he met director José Luis Borau, who taught screenwriting. They later collaborated on such landmark movies as *Furtivos* (1975) and *Camada negra* (*Black Brood*—1977). A fellow student, Luis Megino, has been his co-writer and producer since 1979.

Megino and Gutiérrez Aragon work with many of the same crew and performers on nearly all of their projects. *Half of Heaven*'s heroine, Rosa, is played by Angela Molina, who also starred in *Camada negra, El corazón del bosque* (*The Heart of the Forest*—1979) and *Demonios en el jardín* (*Demons in the Garden*—1982). She plays opposite the distinguished actor, director, screenwriter, and playwright Fernando Fernán Gómez, active since the 1940s. The third important character is Margarita Lozano, whom film buffs will remember as Ramona in Buñuel's *Viridiana*. The latter two actors attained popularity in the late 1950s and early 1960s—precisely the period in which *Half of Heaven* takes place.

The film begins in a "small village in the Cantabrian mountains"—near Santander, where Gutiérrez Aragon spent his own childhood and youth in the 1950s. This locale bears near-mythological significance for many Spaniards. The forest and mountains of the North evoke key chapters in Hispanic history and embody notions of national destiny. In the days of the Roman occupation, Seneca described Spain as a land so full of trees that a squirrel could travel from one end of the country to the other by hopping from tree to tree. Centuries of war, erosion, and excessive tree-cutting left most of the country barren and dry, rendering much of the Spanish earth inhospitable. The North is one of the few areas with abundant rainfall, lush forests, and fertile land. To invoke the North is to conjure up the image of a place that has not been pillaged and destroyed, a land before the proverbial Fall.

Woods and forests have therefore long been an obsessive motif in Spanish films, particularly in the last decade of Franco's life, when film-makers would often present bloodthirsty hunting scenes as an ironic commentary upon Franco's famous statement that Spain was like a peaceful forest. Saura (*La Caza*), Borau (*Furtivos*), and Berlanga (*Patrimonio Nacional*) all used the forest in this allegorical manner to represent what was going on underneath the calm surface of Francoism.

Thus Gutiérrez Aragon's setting not only has personal resonances but also sets up certain expectations on the part of Spanish audiences. In the course of the film, Gutiérrez Aragon plays with those expectations, alternately frustrating and fulfilling them, by interweaving the natural and the supernatural, neorealism and surrealism, the body and the spirit, cinema and fairy tales.

At the outset of the film, he carefully situates his village protagonists in terms of their natural environment—where they participate in a predictable cycle of seasons and events. Individual lives are subordinated to more general patterns of birth, death, and renewal. Gutiérrez Aragon therefore does not explore individual psychology or motivation. He rarely films his characters in close-up; in fact he does not even introduce them, leaving it to his viewers to identify them as the story unfolds.

When the film begins, Rosa (played by Angela Molina's younger sister) is an adolescent living on a farm with her parents, her two half-witted sisters, and her grandmother, Olvido—the spiritual center of the family, played by

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When the film begins, Rosa (played by Angela Molina's younger sister) is an adolescent living on a farm with her parents, her two half-witted sisters, and her grandmother, Olvido—the spiritual center of the family, played by

Margarita Lozano. In the opening sequence, the camera pans over beautiful green hills and comes to rest upon the grandmother's wooden clogs—the kind of magical shoes that Druid priestesses must have worn—and then upon the grandmother herself. She is alone, smoking a cigar, engaged in certain mysterious rites. At one point we surmise that she is urinating in the woods. We watch as the flow of water joins a stream and becomes a waterall. Gutiérrez Aragon establishes a visual association between the grandmother and the forces of nature, especially those related to water. As if to emphasize this connection, Olivdo carries a cane that is a cross between a divining rod and a magic wand, the visible sign of her special powers and authority.

Olvido is particularly close to granddaughter Rosa, the only one who pays attention when she speaks in riddles and foresees the future. She tells Rosa that one day she will meet a knife-sharpener and fall in love. If they should marry, however, this will only bring Rosa unhappiness. As the seasons pass and Rosa grows up, she meets the knife-sharpener and the prophecy is fulfilled in all of its details. Rosa finds herself married, pregnant, and almost immediately widowed. When her daughter is born, Rosa names her Olvido.

Throughout *Half of Heaven,* Gutiérrez Aragon uses soft-focus photography and muted brown and earth tones to cast a dream-like aura over his characters. He narrates events in an illogical and frequently elliptical way, leaving blanks that the viewer must fill in. He heightens the magical and mythical dimensions of his story by establishing numerous parallels with familiar fairy tales. Rosa is a kind of Cinderella who lives in a house in the woods. She is the good daughter, the one who does all of the chores for her cruel and half-witted (step)sisters under the eyes of the benevolent (god)grandmother. Rosa's ill-fated husband, the knife-sharpener, is the Pied Piper who lures her with the sound of his flute.

After the birth of her child, whom Rosa's father threatens to kill because she is a girl, Rosa flees to Madrid with the infant. There she finds employment as a wet nurse in the house of a wealthy widower (Fernando Fernán Gómez), Chief of Markets & Provisioning for the city.

Even when the action shifts from the village to the city, the story retains its magical dimensions. Gutiérrez Aragon is not interested in reconstructing what Madrid was like in the early 1960s. As in a previous film, *Maravillas* (which also stars Fernán Gómez), he recreates the teeming capital of an earlier Spain, when picaresque protagonists scrambled to survive. Indeed, once she leaves home, Rosa becomes a kind of picaresque heroine, who learns to use her eyes, ears, and wits to fend for herself in the great world. In Madrid under Franco a series of chance encounters and surrealist coincidences shape Rosa's fate—exactly as they would have in the time of Lazarillo de Tormes or Don Quijote.

HALF OF HEAVEN: *Grandmother Olvido*

In addition to Rosa's prescient grandmother and half-witted sisters (who eventually join her in Madrid), we meet the retarded shoeshine boy who first tries to kill her and then becomes her devoted follower, the dealer in contraband meats with a poetic soul (who recounts the tragic fate of the animals whose brains and innards he hawks), a young Falangist health inspector who hopes to woo Rosa with permits, and her aging employer, whose lust for Rosa's rice pudding leads to orgies of eating and vomiting.

Rosa's fortunes begin to change when the latter consents to become her benefactor. Her patron does not assist Rosa in exchange for sexual favors, as one might expect, but because she has satisfied his more infantile alimentary needs—for rice pudding—as well as those of his infant son for milk. Out of gratitude, he helps her to obtain a permit to open a stall in the local market. There she sells animal innards obtained through her black-market connections (a way of life for many years under Franco). Eventually she prospers and again, with the aid of the right connections, opens her own restaurant. Rats abound in every corner of the building; sewer

lines run right through the kitchen. Nevertheless, the restaurant becomes a fashionable meeting place for Falangist politicians; they praise it for its wholesome food prepared in old-fashioned ways.

Gutiérrez Aragon exploits this situation with gentle irony, orchestrating its political, social and even psychic dimensions. In one memorable scene, the Chief of Provisioning hosts a banquet in Rosa's restaurant. After the meal, he delivers a patriotic discourse—a brilliant parody of Falangist rhetoric and values—in which he equates the blood of Spaniards (a veritable obsession in the Francoist cosmology) with the whole milk of Rosa's rice pudding. Both are thick because both come from Spanish breasts. He ends his speech with the pronouncement, "When in doubt, big tits have clout."

This burlesque discourse addressed to Franco's former comrades-in-arms underscores the relation between food and power, and hence the relation between the body and the state. Food and the rituals associated with eating are a central theme in *Half of Heaven*. The banquet stands in marked contrast to other eating scenes in which we see Rosa, her grandmother, and/or her daughter illuminated as in a Dutch painting, silently communing over bread and cheese—a powerful affirmation of female strength and solidarity.

Throughout the film, food is the realm of female power. In *Half of Heaven* the women perform all of the functions appropriate to their sexual and social status in traditional Hispanic society. They milk the cows, breastfeed the children, prepare the meals, and cater to the appetites of the male heads of family. But these activities involve a potentially subversive dimension. Here food designates the natural world which lies outside the control of the Francoist state apparatus. The act of eating induces certain concomitant body functions such as vomiting, defecating, and urinating—which Gutiérrez Aragon does not shrink from presenting. In scenes in which we watch the characters eat, grunt, and perform other body functions, he graphically demonstrates that beyond the rhetoric, over and against prevailing social and sexual taboos, there remains the realm of the body, which has its own powerful exigencies. These ultimately supersede the proscriptions of patriarchal society.

As in other Spanish films, the men are accustomed to having all of their needs immediately gratified. It is precisely for this reason that they are so weak, self-indulgent, and childish.* Victims of their own unbridled appetites, they end up controlled by those who cater to those appetites. One of the most common paradigms in Spanish film is that of weak and ineffectual men who are "devoured" by their lovers, wives, sisters, mothers, or daughters, either directly, through forced feeding or starvation *(Canada negra, Somámbulos)* or directly, through incest, *(Furtivos, La Muchacha de las bragas de oro),* sexual repression *(La muerte de Mikel),* or political manipulation *(Siete Días de enero).*

The presentation of women in *Half of Heaven* differs somewhat from those other films in that Gutiérrez Aragon's women are less cannibalistic. Their relation to food, the body, and power is seen as a more positive alternative to the control of body functions exercised by the Franco regime. There nevertheless remains some ambivalence about them. While in some scenes Gutiérrez Aragon celebrates their empowerment (as, for example, in a beautiful scene in which Rosa is reunited with her grandmother), he suggests that they do not always act in benevolent ways.

This is particularly true in the case of Rosa's daughter Olvido. She is one of a long line of precocious girl children in Spanish movies of the 1960s and 1970s—children who differ radically from their American counterparts in *E.T.* or *Poltergeist* in that they are not cute, naive, or wide-eyed. Like the Anas in Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena,* and Saura's *Cría cuervos,* like Goya in Armiñan's *El nido,* or Estrella in Erice's *El Sur,* Olvido possesses wisdom and clairvoyance. She is powerful, mysterious, and sometimes malevolent. Even as a small child, she has the capacity to decipher her grandmother's riddles and to prophesy the future. When her grandmother passes away, she literally follows in her footsteps by putting on her grandmother's shoes and invoking her pres-

*Indeed, the archetypal model for the character played by Fernando Fernán Gómez is the provincial governor in *Furtivos*—brilliantly played by director José Luis Borau himself. He returns periodically to the forest home of his wet nurse in order to hunt and to savor the special stew that only she can prepare to his taste. As he puts a bib around his neck and takes the first bite of the long-awaited dish, his cronies wait in anxious silence for his reaction. It is a delicious moment in the film.

Granddaughter Olvido inherits grandma's shoes

ence. Through these powers Olvido gains control of the lives of those around her, and even performs acts of vengeance. When her aunts wreck her mother's kitchen the night before a big banquet, she proceeds to poison them, calmly and with determination. When the young student who loves Rosa expresses his desire to marry her, Olvido lets her mother know that the marriage would cost him his life.

Throughout the film Gutiérrez Aragon presents Olvido's acts of magic in down-to-earth realistic terms, juxtaposing them with another kind of magic—that of the cinema itself. Rosa's miraculous rise from rags to riches is the kind of success story associated with Hollywood movies such as *Mildred Pierce.* Rosa herself is an avid consumer of movies. Throughout the film, we watch her watch a number of Spanish films which provide a veritable survey of film history, from the costume dramas popular with Spanish audiences in the late 1940s and 1950s to American movies such as *West Side Story* that helped open up Spain to outside cultural influences in the 1960s.

At the end of Rosa's own cinematic saga, Gutiérrez Aragon offers a final ambiguous twist on the Hollywood happy end. Rosa does end up rich and famous. She does not, however, marry the handsome young prince, but rather presides over his marriage to another girl. In the final reel, he is unable to free her from the spell cast by her own daughter and ultimately, she ends up imprisoned in the castle of her own creation.

None of this, however, seems to be particularly tragic or even sad. The tone of Gutiérrez Aragon's tale remains light-hearted and bemused. When treating politics and past history, the former Marxist no longer denounces but rather ridicules the excesses of the Franco years. We see that the Falangists are drunken and ineffectual, that people are unjustly imprisoned and even tortured in jail, that there is a flourishing black market, and justice depends upon whom you know. This does not elicit great despair or outrage on the part of the director. That is merely how things were in Franco's Spain—and probably how they were intermittently during the preceding 500 years.

In its admixture of down-to-earth naturalism with a deadpan depiction of the supernatural, in its glorification of the basics—good food, loyal friends, and strong women—in its gentle debunking of pretentious notions about Spanish glory, nobility and past greatness, *Half of Heaven* rejoins the Spanish realist tradition found in art and literature from Quevedo to Goya to Buñuel. It is a rich, evocative, and entertaining movie that makes its points with humor and grace.

—KATHERINE S. KOVACS

THE FUNERAL

Director: Juzo Itami. Screenplay: Itami. Producers: Yasushi Tamaoki and Yutaka Okuda. Photography: Yomezu Maeda. Music: Joji Yuasa. New Yorker Films.

Juzo Itami's *Tampopo,* the second film he directed but the first to be released in the US, conveys a child's delight in splashing food around and a happy director's delight in playing with movie conventions and genres. It's free-form, bright-colored and high-flying. *The Funeral*—his first movie as a director, although it's only now opening in America—is relatively subdued and even-toned. It's so well-mannered that some may take it as a generic exercise in aestheticized comic melancholy. But you may find it enjoyably peculiar, as I did: quiet and spare, yet lustrous and inviting. It has the quality of certain jokes that you repeat to yourself time

Granddaughter Olvido inherits grandma's shoes

ence. Through these powers Olvido gains control of the lives of those around her, and even performs acts of vengeance. When her aunts wreck her mother's kitchen the night before a big banquet, she proceeds to poison them, calmly and with determination. When the young student who loves Rosa expresses his desire to marry her, Olvido lets her mother know that the marriage would cost him his life.

Throughout the film Gutiérrez Aragon presents Olvido's acts of magic in down-to-earth realistic terms, juxtaposing them with another kind of magic—that of the cinema itself. Rosa's miraculous rise from rags to riches is the kind of success story associated with Hollywood movies such as *Mildred Pierce.* Rosa herself is an avid consumer of movies. Throughout the film, we watch her watch a number of Spanish films which provide a veritable survey of film history, from the costume dramas popular with Spanish audiences in the late 1940s and 1950s to American movies such as *West Side Story* that helped open up Spain to outside cultural influences in the 1960s.

At the end of Rosa's own cinematic saga, Gutiérrez Aragon offers a final ambiguous twist on the Hollywood happy end. Rosa does end up rich and famous. She does not, however, marry the handsome young prince, but rather presides over his marriage to another girl. In the final reel, he is unable to free her from the spell cast by her own daughter and ultimately, she ends up imprisoned in the castle of her own creation.

None of this, however, seems to be particularly tragic or even sad. The tone of Gutiérrez Aragon's tale remains light-hearted and bemused. When treating politics and past history, the former Marxist no longer denounces but rather ridicules the excesses of the Franco years. We see that the Falangists are drunken and ineffectual, that people are unjustly imprisoned and even tortured in jail, that there is a flourishing black market, and justice depends upon whom you know. This does not elicit great despair or outrage on the part of the director. That is merely how things were in Franco's Spain—and probably how they were intermittently during the preceding 500 years.

In its admixture of down-to-earth naturalism with a deadpan depiction of the supernatural, in its glorification of the basics—good food, loyal friends, and strong women—in its gentle debunking of pretentious notions about Spanish glory, nobility and past greatness, *Half of Heaven* rejoins the Spanish realist tradition found in art and literature from Quevedo to Goya to Buñuel. It is a rich, evocative, and entertaining movie that makes its points with humor and grace.

—KATHERINE S. KOVACS

THE FUNERAL

Director: Juzo Itami. Screenplay: Itami. Producers: Yasushi Tamaoki and Yutaka Okuda. Photography: Yomezu Maeda. Music: Joji Yuasa. New Yorker Films.

Juzo Itami's *Tampopo,* the second film he directed but the first to be released in the US, conveys a child's delight in splashing food around and a happy director's delight in playing with movie conventions and genres. It's free-form, bright-colored and high-flying. *The Funeral*—his first movie as a director, although it's only now opening in America—is relatively subdued and even-toned. It's so well-mannered that some may take it as a generic exercise in aestheticized comic melancholy. But you may find it enjoyably peculiar, as I did: quiet and spare, yet lustrous and inviting. It has the quality of certain jokes that you repeat to yourself time

and time again, wondering why you enjoy them so much. Itami, who is said to be an expert cook, has designed his film to be a passing, melting pleasure, experienced most fully in the savoring of it. Like *Tampopo, The Funeral* seems meant to turn you into a gourmand and a food critic, only in this film, resonances and aftertastes are what Itami orchestrates.

The film is narrated by a successful middle-aged actor, who is married to an actress he sometimes works with. In the opening scenes her father, who lives in a country home near the ocean with her mother, has a bad heart attack. He pulls himself over the floor to the porch; when his wife finds him there, he explains that he was trying to get a look at the ocean—that the sight of it had helped him over such spells before. A few days later, in the hospital, he dies. The film's skeleton is a chronicle of the ceremonies—and the preparations and worries that attend them—during the three days that follow. Laced in and around these basics are a variety of mild farce elements: a cranky older brother, a naughty mistress, eccentric neighbors, confusion about roles. You can sense that everything in the film is presented in relation to ritual even though you don't always know what the rituals are—like the characters, we learn about them as we go along. The acting milieu and the stage set-like house (whose rooms lend themselves to being seen two or three at a time) help give the film a backstage-farce vivacity; Itami has been an actor himself, and he's especially good at using performances to bring out the flavors of locales and situations.

These ingredients are like glimmers that draw you into watching, or dreaming about, what's going on down below: in this case, a tone poem that is a meditation on the dispersal of form. (Being drawn through the chronicle and farce creates its own awareness of dispersal.) Itami has shot and recorded his film so that there's always something about the surfaces that makes you lose yourself in what's beneath them. Everything—even new, pop objects—seems to have a patina, and a succulent, hand-rubbed richness: the sheen of wood, leather, and flesh are especially vivid. The blacks, like the blacks in *The Conformist* and *The Makioka Sisters,* are warm, active. Here, they're in correspondence with another, deeper layer: a shadow black. The sounds unfold themselves for our delectation: the sound of hair being brushed, the ringing of a ritual bell (percussion, clang, tone, buzz, etc.); the sound of flowers burning, of rain pelting first a nylon umbrella and then a paper umbrella. One quick, stunning effect occurs when a furnace fire ignites: Fwoof, and a room's paper windows thwack and crinkle outwards with the pressure.

A Buddhist priest, who arrives in a white Rolls and who lights up at the sight of tabletops inlaid with French tiles, is played by Chishu Ryu, and the Ozu echo must be deliberate—Itami's film suggests a loose, appreciative look at a late Ozu picture. But it has an element of the random and erotic, of darting play, that's lacking in Ozu: Itami wants to convey his pleasure in the processes that give rise to and sustain ritual and performance. There's life washing around the whole time, like static around a clear signal: kids tussling, people's feet tiring as they squat on their knees, friends arriving to help out with food and chores. Itami is bringing us into contact with ghost presences, letting us swim among crisscrossing impulses. The layers reveal themselves and return you to the next surface.

The film's events strike your mind like stones striking water, and watching the rings of ripples expand and mingle can be very pleasurable. Several shots are from the point of view of the corpse. Through his eyes, so to speak, we watch his family bend over to peer at him, and we see the coffin lid lowered and two small doors opened to permit viewing. These shots, and several others like them, are grotesque jokes, but they're held longer than we expect, and are repeated until we become familiar with them. They're like the sound of that ritual bell—ours to wander around in. They're also reminders of a great shot in Dreyer's *Vampyr,* and expressions of a feeling that so long as the physical vessel exists, the spirit continues to dwell within it. In other scenes we're given a moving-through-a-tunnel effect. The camera precedes the hearse as it moves along narrow, wall-bound roads, over which trees close in; it rides the coffin into the furnace. By the time the crematorium chimney pours forth its smoke, and the widow, actor, and actress burn the ceremony's used bric-a-brac in a barrel, we may find ourselves thinking about how we are both chambers and enclosures.

Two scenes rise up out of what the other scenes flow into, and with a kind of blind force.

One involves the actor and his mistress. The young woman, who has arrived with the mourners and has grown drunk and resentful, lures him into a wooded area. She seductively exposes her neck to him, taunts him, and finally incites him into sex. Afterwards, he falls and muddies himself trying to fetch a bauble she's lost. She laughs happily; he slaps her but she keeps on laughing—she's tickled by the trouble she has caused him. During the other scene, some members of the family happen upon a behind-the-scenes room at the crematorium. They look through a viewing hole in the furnace and see the corpse burning, and they talk to a technician about his job. This likable man, who bowed to the furnace before lighting it, tells about his dreams, and about his fears that one day a body he has put in the furnace won't yet be dead. (We can know little about death; all we are empowered to do is become specialists in the rituals attendant on it.) A glen, hot with glowing chlorophyll and insects; the guts of a kind of factory—these scenes take place in realms where ritual, at least as we can know it, is supported and made possible.

The film's tone edges towards comedy and then dissolves. What we grow familiar with is a rhythm of gathering, tensing, and then dispersing into a new set of forms. American audiences are used to a fantasy that there is some realm we can get to where we can be happy, powerful gods—a domain that's often symbolized, at least in audiovisual terms, by dance numbers, car chases, gunplay, couples splashing in the California surf. Itami's assumption seems to be that it is part of the nature of identity to be dissatisfied with given forms, and that all that is available to us is a release into something about which we can know only that it has its own form; all energy and matter can hope to do is metamorphose. (He directs as though he believes that this can be achieved only via a heightening of our awareness of form—via something like fetishism. He's as concerned with fetishism as De Palma, yet there's nothing very obsessive in his way of seeing, and nothing very bound-in about the film. Fetishism, in the world of this film, is just what happens when you tighten your focus and begin to bear down.) You begin to picture a life (or a movie) as a gathering of energy and matter, a channeling of them through space and time, and a final dispersal into something we can know nothing

THE FUNERAL

about. The film's approach and style express the conviction that there's an equivalence between ritual's place in behavior, the body's place in experience and form's place in acting and art—that for all their drawbacks, ritual, the body, and form are what make sensation possible.

There's nothing overbearing or strict about Itami's work; he's an entertainer, and he deals with ideas by nicking them as he passes by, making them spin. They're part of the show. A joke is "resolved" in a way characteristic of the film near the end. All along, the husband has been expected to give a talk about the deceased at a final dinner, and while he's being introduced, his eyes are glassy and his knee twitches; this actor suffers from stage fright. But the widow indicates that she'd like to speak instead. The actor relaxes and the audience laughs; he has been given a reprieve. The widow talks quietly about her regret that she wasn't able to be present as her husband died; she was kept out of the room by the crush of doctors and nurses, and she is afraid that he may have been lonely. She talks about her feeling that her husband's nature has changed, about a feeling she has that he and she have entered a new phase together. The camera closes in on her slowly, then cuts to a close-up. We understand that this is her discreet public acknowledgment of the momentousness of what she's going through. (Watching her is like realizing that a local, family-owned store you've been planning to patronize has changed hands.) Yet the camera's exposure is set more for the brightness outdoors than indoors—the light on her face is grey and dim—and even as we take in her tiny, worn face and her struggle with her feelings and words, our vision is drawn past her and through the large window behind. We can see the porch and

the green of trees, and we sense the presence of the ocean beyond, the sight of which the dying man hoped would heal his heart. *The Funeral* is about rituals that release the spirit, about giving up the ghost. It offers its own to us as a gift.

—RAY SAWHILL

A FLASH OF GREEN

Director: Victor Nunez. Script: Nunez. Photography: Gus Holzer. Music: Charles Engstrom.

In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," the philosopher Walter Benjamin describes a mode of historical experience transmitted by a momentary, fleeting image of the past:

> The true picture of the past flashes by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.
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> To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger.[1]

The ephemeral quality of the historical image described by Benjamin is conveyed in the opening scene of *A Flash of Green,* the 1984 film by Florida film-maker Victor Nunez. Jimmy Wing runs to be included in a group photograph while the self-timer on his camera ticks away and Kat Hubble exclaims "the moment is passing." This sequence begins the film with a palpable discontinuity, denying the viewer a seamless temporal narrative through its suggestion of a complex imbrication of subjective and social memory. We later learn that it is a flashback and that in the intervening year both characters have lost their spouses. The cut from this scene to a black-and-white photograph which dissolves into the waters of Grassy Bay, the focus of the film's story, alerts us to the centrality of image production as its organizing metaphor. It makes explicit the precarious status of the historical image, reminding the viewer of the ease with which it may irretrievably disappear.

At a moment when independent film-makers such as Jim Jarmusch are widely touted as the future of the American cinema, Victor Nunez's outstanding films have received little critical attention. This may be due to his predilection for the genre of the historical drama with a regional setting, a cinematic mode perhaps unjustly associated with dreariness in the minds of some film viewers. Or it may lie in the fact that *A Flash of Green* was co-produced by the American Playhouse and later broadcast on television, making Nunez's film seem superficial by association.

Yet a viewing of Nunez's films counters these accusations and stereotypes, their accomplished production values and socially critical thrust redeeming them as serious objects of study. One of his earliest films is entitled *A Circle in the Fire* and is based upon a Flannery O'Connor short story. In his 1979 feature debut, *Gal Young 'Un,* the downfall of a prohibition era bootlegger is a pretext for exploring the impact of an expanding money economy upon a rural Florida economy. Despite the film's infelicitous title, its intricate deployment of flashbacks, careful framing of images, and unusual subplot of matriarchal revolt made it an impressive, if little acknowledged debut.

A Flash of Green is set again in Florida, this time in 1961 in a Gulf Coast town called Palm City. The decision by members of the local business community to petition for the right to build a luxury housing development on the site of Grassy Bay (a publicly administered land-trust), is the central conflict of the novel by John D. MacDonald which Nunez has closely followed in his film.

Advocates of the Palmland development have a secret ally in Elmo Bliss (Richard Jordan), a county commissioner and a local success story who made his fortune in the construction business and became popular by performing political favors for his supporters. Elmo's great personal charm and easygoing manner have made him into a local hero who enjoys the respect and admiration of many in the town. He views the Palmland project as a means of funding his campaign for governor, the most recent expression of a personal craving for power and influence.

Born and raised in Palm City, Jimmy Wing is a reporter for the local newspaper. After Elmo calls him one day to leak the news of the proposed bayfill, he shares his information with Kat Hubble, the leader of the Save Our Bay group which prevented a previous attempt by outsiders to fill in the bay. Jimmy is deeply attracted by Kat, the widow of his best friend who was killed a year earlier in an automobile accident. His own wife is slowly dying of a degenerative nerve disease in a state sanitarium,

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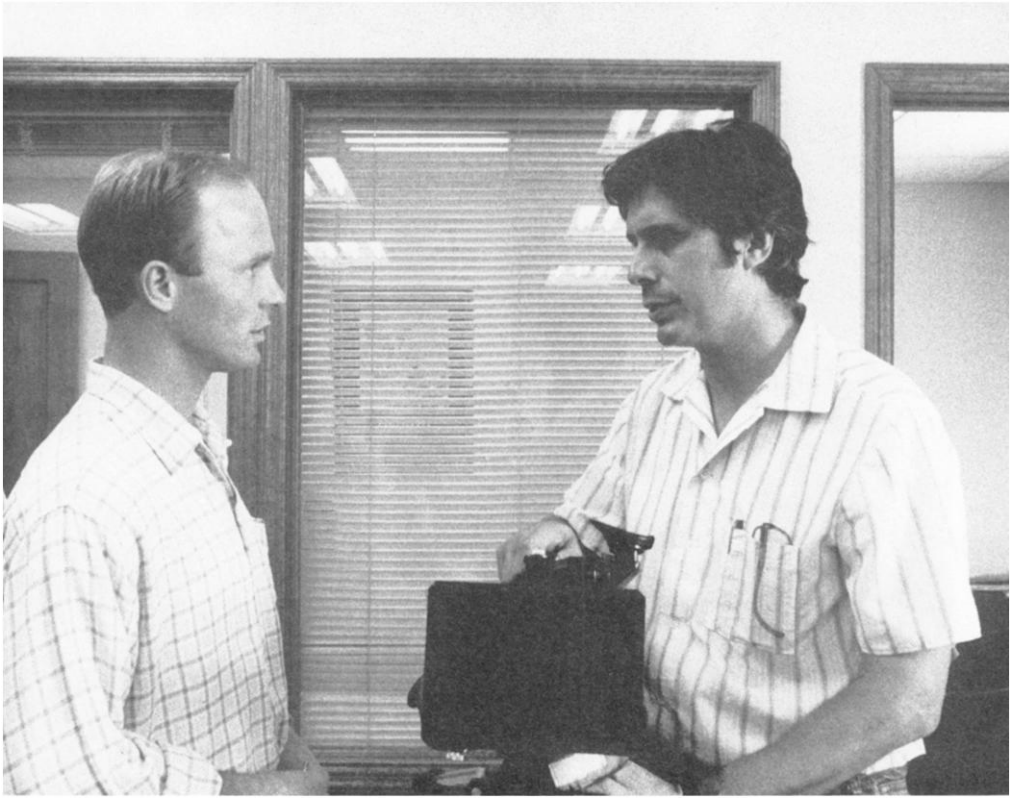

Ed Harris talks with director Victor Nunez during the filming of A Flash of Green

leaving him technically married, but in fact very much alone. Elmo is aware of Jimmy's feelings for Kat and convinces him to gather information for a smear campaign against the ecologists, intimating that rougher people from the outside will be hired should he refuse to assist.

The reasons for Jimmy's acceptance of Elmo's proposal are never made entirely clear by the film, a major liability in my opinion. Although opposed to the bayfill, Jimmy is drawn to the fatherlike figure of Elmo, who although not much older is constructed by the film as a source of knowledge and authority in the public sphere of the town. Elmo has also helped Jimmy personally on many occasions, most recently by arranging for his wife to be admitted to the state sanitarium for medical treatment. In the absence of any close male friend since the death of Kat's husband, Van, Jimmy has become emotionally dependent on Elmo, and the film presents their relationship as a fragile instance of male bonding cemented by previous collective accomplishments. Trying to convince Jimmy to help the Palmlanders, Elmo says, "You're a small-town cynic. Why not come aboard for the ride and observe the animals real close. Let's you and me stir things up again." Elmo grasps the nature of Jimmy's predilection for the role of observer, a position which enables him to travel between different social classes without the necessity of making moral judgments. His own uncertain future as a member of the indigenous lower-middle class threatened by gentrification pulls Jimmy towards the circle of businessmen associated with the Palmland project, even as he disagrees with their aims. We are not made to understand whether Jimmy's sleuthing for the Palmlanders reflects a character failure, a sense of loyalty to Elmo, a desire to add shape to his life by committing a moral transgression, or simply what he later tells Kat, that he "needed something to do." Through its refusal to offer a single convincing explanation, the film suggests that all of these factors play a role.

Jimmy's activities destroy several personal lives and greatly weaken the morale of the SOB group. He later confesses his complicity with the Palmlanders to Kat and in remorse manages by slugging the publisher to print an expose of his spying in the newspaper. Elmo denies Jimmy's allegations at a public hearing, but agrees to refrain from voting on the project when it comes before the commission. It is eventually approved anyway. Jimmy is rehired by the newspaper through Elmo's influence and he slowly renews his friendship with Kat Hubble.

Placed centrally in the film, the flash of green contained in its title is a fleeting change of color in the sky which, according to local legend, is

capable of granting wishes. It appears in the flashback narrative of Aunt Middy, an elderly matriarch figure who witnessed the viridescent horizon while fishing on the bay at the turn of the century, a scene in the film of striking beauty. This sequence commands attention not merely because of its visual splendor, but rather because of the way it functions as a point of intersection for tensions and themes contained in the narrative.

Turning again to the notion of the historical image developed by Benjamin, a convincing reading of this scene emerges:

> Every present is determined by those images which are synchronic with it: every now is the moment of a specific recognition. In it, truth is loaded to the bursting point with time. . . It isn't that the past casts its light on the present or the present casts its light on the past: rather, an image is that in which the past and the present moment flash into a constellation. In other words, image is dialectic at standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, that of the past to the moment is dialectical: not of a temporal, but of an imagistic nature. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical, i.e., not archaic images. The image that is read, I mean the image at the moment of recognition, bears to the highest degree the stamp of the critical, dangerous impulse that lies at the source of all reading.[2]

Benjamin understood history as a fundamentally discontinuous space resistant to all attempts to construct linear or homogeneous narratives. Certain images and objects from the past possess the ability to puncture our unjustified belief in historical continuity, destroying the appearance of permanence and necessity which often serves to legitimate the existing political and social order. Such images establish a fleeting and temporary bridge between the past and the present, but an unusual one in which the full significance of the latter is only attained via a circuitous detour through the former. The "true" character of the present is grasped through those images of the past whose subsequent recognition in an act of insightful reading provides support for political struggles. Benjamin called such images "dialectical" and understood them as constituents of a vital historical consciousness by virtue of the constellations they formed between the past and the present.

The flash of green in the sky is a utopian wish image, a dialectical image, *par excellence*. Its color and conspicuous location over Grassy Bay (the proposed site of the Palmland project) identify it with money and nature, but Aunt Middy's words dispel this interpretation. She explains that her presence on the boat that day was due to her husband's ill partner; and her voice-over informs us that labor, the fight against disease, and the struggle to obtain sufficient food were the primary concerns of the community. "There could never be enough green for all the wishes I had," she says, and it is here in her unspecified wishes that the referent of the green flash must be sought. The drudgery and suffering related in Aunt Middy's narrative contrast markedly with the degraded modes of production and consumption evident in Palm City and epitomized in the Palmland project. Juxtaposed to its extravagant utilization of labor and resources, the green flash conjures up a faint and practically forgotten wish image of a world in which technology and social organization exist to ameliorate hardship and suffering. The green flash calls attention to a utopian image from the past, reviving the memory of a forgotten future at a moment of political crisis in Palm City. It gives the lie to the belief in the inevitability of development voiced repeatedly in the film by Elmo, and embodies the critical, dangerous impulse which Benjamin found in that mode of reading which facilitates authentic historical experience.

Much of the film depicts Palm City from Jimmy's car, a silent enclosed space from which we gaze at the material configurations of everyday life belonging to an earlier, yet familiar historical moment. The blinding whiteness of mens' shirts or the automobiles the color of fruit sherbet convey a peculiar visual fascination. Despite the simplicity of the film's sets, its world radiates a unique density and substantiality, a calm and reassuring vision of the early 1960s with its fashions, luncheonette counters, and centralized urban centers. No hints of later shopping malls, closed circuit television cameras, and fast food restaurants are to be seen. Reading America of the 1980s through the film's depiction of Palm City, it is difficult not to become overcome with nostalgia for an anterior historical moment, one perhaps invented after the fact rather than actually experienced.

Yet the film discourages such sentiments. Driving along the main street of Palm City, Jimmy's gaze comes to rest upon a group of

children outside a matinee movie. Filmed through the side window of his car, the shot lingers and calls to mind an earlier scene in which his partner reports the death of a drowned child and muses about what he might have become. Suspended between the utopian memories of childhood and a vision of Palm City on the verge of its destruction, such an image, too, is dialectical.

Stylistically, the film's predilection for staging action in lingering tableaux, sweeping pans, and elaborate tracking shots exemplifies its tendency towards edgy contemplation. This is particularly apparent in its treatment of Jimmy's automobile. His car becomes the locus of a tension between two types of light and space: the open expanse of blue sky around the bay and the artificially illuminated interiors of homes and offices. Rarely does the film present an interior scene without the obstructive framing of windows, doors, fishtanks, and other objects. If one translates this stylistic tendency from the level of form to that of content, private property emerges as the film's covert agenda. Its existence is constantly made visible through the segmentation of space along the divisions of public/private, business/social, and indoor/outdoor. What is ultimately so remarkable about Nunez's film is the success with which it translates MacDonald's formulaic novel into a cogent work of social analysis through its sophisticated command of visual form. That Nunez himself served as the film's screenplay author, director of photography, and editor is equally impressive.

The "passing moment" announced at the film's beginning refers not simply to a stage in Jimmy's personal biography, but resonates with greater historical significance in its evocation of an earlier self-sufficient frontier economy to whose final traces it pays melancholy tribute. *A Flash of Green* presents an image of the South struggling to "catch up" after decades of economic underdevelopment. Enjoying the benefits of Keynesian economic policies after the end of World War II, Florida is shown on the verge of a massive wave of growth which was to culminate in the arrival of a dynamic industrial base of electronics research, defense contracting, and aeronautics stimulated by the cold war.[3] The social and political referents of this influx of capital and individuals—affluent emigrants from the decaying core cities of the North and a buildup of the military-industrial complex—are hinted at repeatedly throughout the film. The events covered by Jimmy in his news beat such as the dedication of a plaque in memory of the victims of the Korean War by a local group of conservatives present Palm City as a space in which larger national political tensions are played out on the microcosmic level of everyday life.

A Flash of Green succeeds particularly well in depicting the politically charged character of daily life in the town while the bayfill project awaits approval. When Kat wears an ecology button to the bank where she works, her employer chastises her for introducing politics into the workplace, even as he prepares to meet with the Palmland group to review their loan application. The film demonstrates the corrupt nature of a local government controlled by a small circle of private citizens in search of personal gain. While preserving all the superficial features of democratic process, the workings of the county commission expose the identity of public and private interests among Palm City's leading citizens. The film also debunks the myth of an impartial press operating in the public interest, as we see Jimmy's boss cutting a story on the ecologists which he arbitrarily deems not newsworthy.

After the Palmlanders direct the followers of a rightwing evangelist against a recalcitrant SOB member, Jimmy confesses to Kat that he joined forces with them only to insure her safety, an explanation of his conduct which does not appear entirely plausible. When Kat

A Flash of Green: *Blair Brown as Kat Hubble*

and Jimmy sleep together, a strangely anticlimactic moment in the film, their erotic encounter appears understandable given the loneliness and confusion of their personal lives. One of the film's virtues is its suggestion that political and social commitment cannot be considered in isolation from the emotional needs and dependencies of its practitioners. Kat's meticulous organization and her boundless enthusiasm for the SOB project are but the other side of her highstrung temperament and inability to accept the death of her husband. If the film refuses to localize Jimmy's complicity with the Palmlanders in any specific flaw in his character, it does make clear that his behavior cannot be abstracted from the matrix of social and ideological pressures which characterize his life.

Here it is instructive to turn again to the film's opening scene on the beach. Its status as a flashback for Jimmy (to whom it returns repeatedly throughout the film) marks the group portrait as the site of his trauma, the image through which he attempts to stave off personal crisis.

The repetition of this flashback, its obsessive positing of an impossible desire for a lost object, exemplifies the compulsion to repeat—which psychoanalysis understands as the movement by which the subject transforms instinctual unpleasure into the pleasure of cultural mastery.[4] Here we may consider Freud's distinction between primary and secondary process as an account of two ways in which psychical energy circulates, according to whether it is "free" or "bound." By projecting the memory trace of a required object onto the screen of the conscious, the primary process seeks a complete libidinal discharge of energy through the shortest possible route—the reproduction of ideas upon which satisfaction has conferred special value in hallucinations and reams. Secondary process utilizes linguistic rather than visual raw material, it attempts to bind libidinal energy and convert it to thought, thereby defusing instinctual unpleasure.

We find this movement from image to thought in the opening scene where Jimmy is seated at his desk, the group portrait behind him on the wall, now accompanied by the staccato sound of his typing. His mastery of the image and the painful memories of his absent wife and best friend is now secure, a necessary precondition for his literary productivity. The notebook next to his typewriter alerts us to the importance of language in Jimmy's life, his entire existence revolving around the transformation of images and impressions into words. After he exposes Elmo's duplicity, Jimmy becomes persona non grata in Palm City and is given several severe beatings by Elmo's supporters whom he intentionally provokes. His entire social identity rests on his relationship to Elmo and rather than begin a new life elsewhere, Jimmy pursues a masochistic course of behavior in which his ambivalence towards Elmo and simultaneous desire to once more "belong" in Palm City are reflected in the wounded surface of his body.

Even after the revelations about Elmo's complicity with business interests, the ordinary people of Palm City retain confidence in his integrity. The ecologists are unable to change the convictions of Elmo's many redneck supporters, and the presence of individuals from both camps at the funeral of Jimmy's wife conveys the difficulties of separating personal and political loyalties in a small town. As one of Elmo's supporters remarks, "The word has gotten out that the bayfill is just what the county needs." By representing the members of the SOB group as outsiders lacking the experience of a shared collective past, the Palmlanders transform a class conflict based upon property relations into a confrontation between longtime natives and those who lack the experience of a shared collective past. Unable to grasp the paradox of using life in a tightly knit rural community as a defense of capitalist expansion, Elmo becomes a self-serving prophet of progress when he remarks to Jimmy, "All the wild things and magic places are gone forever. Why should we allow a group of outsiders [the SOB members] to come in and tell us what to do with the land we were born and raised on?"

Standing on the beach where the film begins, now separated from the bay by a chainlink fence, Jimmy is approached by a security guard in the film's final scene. The guard tells him that he is on private property, but also comments on the beauty of the illuminated dredge before them. Returning to full circle to the scene of the group portrait, the film concludes with Jimmy's mournful gaze at Grassy Bay. Echoing the personal significance of this image to Jimmy, its final recurrence at the film's conclusion is doubly inscribed as a signifier of the

political crisis of Palm City. The haunting and at times extraordinarily powerful quality of Nunez's film rests in this ability to deploy images which convey a sense of social emergency no less urgent than the forms of personal turmoil it depicts. When an automobile wreck is reported to the newspaper, Jimmy and a colleague rush to the site of the accident, a deserted highway strewn with wreckage upon which ambulances, flashing lights, and sirens converge at a moment of crisis, which is simultaneously banal and ordinary.

"The concept of progress should be based on the idea of catastrophe. That things 'just keep on going' *is* the catastrophe. It isn't that which lies ahead, but that which is always given," writes Benjamin.[5] Poised between nostalgia and negativity, *A Flash of Green* is a film rich in images of catastrophe which destabilize historical permanence and call attention to the crises and catastrophes of everyday life. The weakness of Nunez's film rests in its inability to posit a collective subject capable of responding to the challenges it depicts, while declining to provide a coherent explanation of Jimmy's behavior. Resignation and anguished contemplation form a powerful counterpoint to the more hopeful and malleable view of historical process presented by the film. How Victor Nunez will resolve these tensions in future films should certainly deserve close attention.

—EDWARD DIMENDBERG

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken, 1969, p. 255. I have made corrections in this translation.
2. Walter Benjamin, "N, [Theoretics of Knowledge, Theory of Progress]," trans. Leigh Hafrey and Richard Sieburth, *The Philosophical Forum,* Vol. XV, Nos. 1-2, Fall-Winter, 1983-84, p. 8. This an excellent translation of the methodological chapter of Benjamin's Arcades Project.
3. See Alfred J. Watkins and David C. Perry, "Regional Change and the Impact of Uneven Development" in *The Rise of the Sunbelt Cities,* eds. Perry and Watkins, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977, p. 47.
4. Here I am indebted to Kaja Silverman's essay "Masochism and Subjectivity," *Framework* (12), p. 3. See also the essay on primary and secondary processes in J. Laplance and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, New York: Norton, 1973, pp. 339-341 upon which I have also relied in my understanding of Freud.
5. Benjamin, "N," p. 21.

TARANG

Director: Kumar Shahani. Script: Rosan and Kumar Shahani. Photography: K. K. Mahajan.

Kumar Shahani's *Tarang* (Wages and Profits), which was recently shown in various American cities and on university campuses as a part of the Festival of India's "New Hindi Cinema" package, demonstrates a remarkable departure from the staple diet which an Indian cinema audience of roughly 13 million a day obediently consume. In *Tarang* we are confronted, not only with an unusual narrative structure, but more importantly, with a story told through a discourse that makes the spectator aware all the time of a significant mediation going on between the film-maker and his material.

The storyline is complex. Seeds of dissension are beginning to grow in the industrial empire of an aging industrialist. For him business has only one purpose—that of amassing wealth for the family. His views are challenged by his nephew Dinesh and his son-in-law Rahul. His daughter Hansa sits on the sidelines and watches with growing anxiety the effect the conflict is having on her father. A withdrawn woman, she feels that she has done her duty by providing an heir to the vast family fortunes.

It is into this troubled household that Rahul brings a maidservant, Janaki, to look after his son. Janaki belongs to the shanty-town world where the workers in the industrialist's factory eke out their existence. Her dead husband had once led the workers against the management and she is still considered potentially dangerous because of the respect and affection she commands among the workers.

Gradually the lives of Rahul and Janaki become inextricably wound up with each other. Rahul is clearly attracted to the maid. Hansa, now more and more distant and obsessed with her father, encourages the relationship.

Rahul secures enough control over the business to feel that the ailing industrialist is a liability. He keeps his wife away from her father on the pretext that she is too delicate to stand the strain. Janaki is persuaded to befriend the nurse, and after a night spent in drunken stupor in Janaki's room, the nurse returns to find the old man dead. Hansa, as though in a dream, clings to her grief for her dead father. Finally she kills herself.

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There is a rift in the ranks of the workers and Abdul, Janaki's friend and admirer, is on the run. Rahul then successfully breaks the solidarity of different sections of the workers, and having no further need for Janaki, informs her that she is likely to be accused of the industrialist's murder. Janaki is betrayed—but freed from illusion. She packs her belongings and goes back to her old life, taking refuge with Namdeo, an old worker friend who is also on the run. As she waits for him to return home one evening, someone throws a home-made bomb into the shack. It goes up in flames which bathe Janaki in their golden glow.

The film ends on a conjectural mythical note. In a dreamlike sequence on a long, deserted bridge, Rahul approaches Janaki and offers her a life of freedom and equality. Janaki, as the Goddess who is one-in-herself, replies: "Go back to your destiny. I am like the first light of the sun. I am as hard to catch as the wind . . ."[1]

The film's geography presents us with several important tragic sites. One is the space where power resides and is represented by the industrialist's "balcony" in his opulent mansion. This is contiguous with the spaces in which the film's two predominant women characters figure. Hansa inhabits two distinct areas: her bedroom, presented quite literally, and an apparently nearby sea-beach landscape which is presented more as a fantasy. Janaki's "hut" in the shanty town is the other important strategic spot mapped out by the film. What is common to both womens' territories is the tragic "window" before which they are made to perform important actions.

The industrialist's balcony is the visible and dreadful place where power lurks. This is where the patriarch and different members of his family always have their business showdowns. The industrialist sits on his ancestral swing and makes his decisions. Daughter Hansa who worships him always abides by them and obeys. Son-in-law Rahul therefore has to bear not only the old man's wrath but also his wife's punishment of inaccessibility. The balcony keeps schemes that are hatched here secret and invisible from the world which stretches below it. Worshiper of the profit motive, the industrialist has now set his mind on collaboration with a foreign multinational—spurred on by his nephew Dinesh who wants such a merger for his own personal gain. Rahul, who has opted for native technology and indigenous resources, is repeatedly overruled. This site, therefore, sets up the confrontation between the two men who in their entrepreneurial excess are determined to stop at nothing.

Hansa's bedroom is depicted as a claustrophobic area of darkness into which her own whiteness of skin (she is an upper-caste Aryan Brahmin), her pale mourning sarees, and her inconsolable grief all metonymically dissolve. Shahani shows her as a woman embarking on an anxious journey from overwhelming grief to a strange secrecy that finds its fear expressed in an imaginary zone of "nature" far away from this room. The device which allows this exchange to take place is her bedroom window. In one revealing scene, as a ghostlike Hansa walks away from the window (through which she has been staring outside) towards the camera and exits off frame, Shahani dollies the camera very slowly towards the window itself. As we move closer, we become aware of the exterior space of the seashore, with the tiny figure of an unknown woman in a bright orange saree walking slowly on the rocks near the sea. We connect this unknown woman with Hansa's "other" version of herself; whenever she chooses to wander in nature as this imagined other, she is always shown dressed in extremely vibrant colors of orange and red, and surrounded by an artificially emphasized idyll of blue.

Janaki's hut, the film's other major area, becomes in an important scene the site of her retrospective narration of love. Janaki and Abdul, a close friend of her late husband and now her ardent admirer, are shown seated on a cot. As Shahani tracks in a semicircular arc from Janaki to Abdul then reverses the movement back to her, Janaki describes in a lengthy, moving monologue her brief but intensely rewarding married experience with her dedicated union-worker/husband. The camera movement categorically presents a woman who as subject insists on *living* this scene without being overwhelmed by the painful circumstances surrounding her. This is further strengthened by the window behind her which opens up two distinct spatial areas—glimpsed twice during the camera's slow track across Janaki and Abdul: a mosque and the track where crowded suburban trains pass by. As Janaki narrates the personal ecstasy of her married life and the

prolonged agony of her present destitution and exploitation by those responsible for her husband's murder, the useless world of religion and the murderous roar of industrial progress also get specifically indicted. Furthermore, her extended recital, delivered so passionately and unflinchingly straight to the camera, reveals her firm resolve to tempt her own fate and go beyond the limits imposed on her by the combined forces of religion, "progress," and those in power who make and break laws in that vicious world that lies outside.

In the film, human relations are determined by the twin forces of lust and authority. Rahul is starved by Hansa's glacial asexuality; his lust for Janaki is born abruptly, and he is seized totally in his expression of this lust. For Rahul, Janaki as the new possessed object appears in a double context. On one level she becomes the substitute Eros figure for Hansa. But on another level she becomes a challenge to his executive class because she belongs to the opposed class of the workers. Shahani therefore defines this erotic contact between the two as a predatory love where sexuality is subject to the fundamental situation of power that each partner can wield over the other. But there is buried irony here. Rahul may wield power in his sexual relations with Janaki but he himself has been threatened with emasculation in his struggle to establish authority in his father-in-law's house. According to Hindu familial traditions, when a man marries he is expected to bring his bride into his parents' house (especially in a joint family set-up). But in Rahul's case, it is he who has been brought into his wife's father's house. This immediately places him in the unhappy role of outsider. Every time Rahul tries to assert himself, he is reminded, by both the industrialist and Hansa, of his excluded position vis-à-vis them. And since they have authenticated his rapid ascent into their elite social class, any symptom of disagreement or disobedience on Rahul's part is deemed familial ingratitude.

The disorder in the industrialist's family is portrayed by Shahani through the two signs of silence and immobility. Hansa's repressed sexuality becomes the first important signifier. After her father's death, she exiles herself into a mute version of a woman seeking momentary sustenance in water and flowers before taking her own life. She drowns like Ophelia, in her own bathtub, with flowers strewn all over her. In a sense her death unites her with her dead father, who was himself reduced to complete immobility by a massive heart attack brought on by tensions within the household. This provides Rahul with the opportunity to eclipse this stubborn titular capitalist who has to be destroyed for a *new* entrepreneur like himself to take over. For Rahul, this act of ingratitude is vital because it finally frees him from the tyranny of the surrogate father figure. But those who deal in power, like Rahul, are also subject to a fear that comes from another kind of authority—a primitive authority that is all the more imposing since it springs from the elemental world of nature itself. Shahani epitomizes this authority through the "earth mother" metamorphoses that he makes Janaki assume in her daily presence at the industrialist's home.

TARANG

When Janaki enters the space of her masters, her primitiveness in dress, movement, and behavior at first overwhelms these same signifiers as paraded by the industrialist's family. She is dark, dusky, and always dressed in earth colors of vibrant greens, mud browns, and blazing reds. Father and daughter are always dressed (and so is Rahul) in freshly starched and ironed white clothes. In the clash of apparel the colonial conflict of oppressor/oppressed is immediately enunciated. Historically, this white preference makes a mockery of the white, rough, homespun cloth Gandhi had taught the enslaved Indian nation how to spin and wear after ordering the burning of every inch of British cloth. Now, through Janaki, Shahani presents us with an independent India's new breed of imperialist masters camouflaging their illegal profits behind a white facade.

Janaki's first bond as earth mother is struck with the grieving Hansa. One day Hansa calls her and gives Janaki palmfuls of withered flowers she has collected from her father's flower-bedecked corpse and stores secretly in her cupboard. She wants Janaki to daily bring her fresh flowers from the garden so that she can sprinkle them on her father's vacant bed. It may not be apparent to Western viewers, but a mythic status is imposed upon Janaki at this moment. As the patronymic of Sita (the heroine of the *Ramayana* epic) Janaki literally translates as "earth mother." In Indian myth, Sita sprang up ready from the furrow when King Janaka was ploughing the ground.[2] By providing flowers for her bourgeois mistress who has lost her nexus with nature, Janaki as earth mother is instrumental not only in restoring Hansa's links with nature but also in allowing Hansa to create that symbolic landscape in nature where her tortured self can find some relief. Since the name "Sita" also stands, in Indian mythology, for a universal symbol of the feminine genitalia, the sexual bond betwen Janaki and Rahul is given mythic significance too. Such mythologizing allows Janaki to move freely between the maternal and the feminine iconification of her womanhood.

Janaki's maternal aspect, however, is not circumscribed within the industrialist's space alone. It is also extended towards her shanty-town worker brethren. For Abdul, she is the giver of love, warmth, and shelter. Once when she gives him water, Shahani mythically composes the shot of a towering bare-waisted motherly Janaki, offering a kneeling Abdul the water of life from a large earthen jar. Again, when Namdeo writhes in an epileptic nightmare besides her, she rises barewaisted and comforts him in her lap. When she takes part in a "morcha" (a walking demonstration) she always walks like a mother—in the center with a protective cordon of her "sons" (the other striking workers) around her.

This elevated status, however, makes Janaki intuitively aware of her power over others, especially men. Shahani always depicts her as a woman who not only surveys herself constantly but is also aware of how she is surveyed by men. This awareness is made to exist side by side with the different interpretations of woman imposed on her by others.

Her sexual presence, for instance, either as whore (Janaki is forced to walk the streets when she is evicted from her hut by the industrialist's hired thugs) or as Rahul's mistress, displays her as a vital woman whose sexuality exists for all male enjoyment and absorption—although her martyred presence as the struggling widow still fighting for her rights presents her with a hard gemlike aura for men like Abdul and Namdeo. Even when the moment of her death arrives, she literally goes out in a blaze of glory. In the film's last scene, a repentant Rahul approaches Janaki on the deserted bridge and offers to take her back. But Janaki spurns the offer. She is not Janaki, she tells him, but an ethereal other who will not be possessed again by *any* man! In Kumar Shahani's words, this stylized last scene is meant to be "an apotheosis of Janaki as the Universal Mother. Janaki is Urvashi, the Dawn-Goddess who had lived with a mortal man, Pururavas, for a while."[3] The myth is taken from the *Rig Veda*. This hymn, in the form of a dialogue between the Dawn Goddess and the mortal Pururavas, depicts her as rejecting his entreaties to come back to him. By granting her that iconic imperative, Shahani seems to make Janaki transcend the "mother" and the "woman" signification, freeing her ultimately from all male ownership, including his own as the film-maker responsible for her creation. Her last words to Rahul may as well be addressed to a contemporary Indian patriarchy which even today continues to claim its Hansas and Janakis as victims: "Go back to your destiny. I am like the first light of the sun. I am as hard to catch as the wind." —DARIUS COOPER

NOTES

1. This synopsis is taken from the booklet *Indian Cinema 1980-1985 (New Delhi: Directorate of Film Festivals, 1985)*, pp. 71-73.
2. John Dawson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History & Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 132.
3. Kumar Shahani quoted in Shanta Gokhale's essay on *Tarang* in the booklet *Indian Cinema 1980-1985*, p. 75.

Books

OUT OF THE PAST
Spanish Cinema After Franco

By John Hopewell. London: British Film Institute, 1986.

John Hopewell's *Out of the Past* is clearly the best book on Spanish cinema thus far published in English. Far more comprehensive than its title suggests, the book devotes its first three chapters (almost half of the text) to films made before 1975 (the year of Franco's death), extending all the way back to the beginning of the silent era.

Though he covers much of the same ground already surveyed by Peter Besas in *Behind the Spanish Lens: Spanish Cinema Under Fascism and Democracy* (1985), this young British scholar provides a much more perceptive analysis of the material and avoids many of the pitfalls of his American predecessor. Unlike Besas, Hopewell doesn't try to provide comprehensive coverage of all films made during these earlier eras, yet he makes some important discoveries that Besas quickly passed over. For example, Hopewell devotes considerable space to Segundo de Chomón, the so-called "Spanish Méliès" who is best known for his cinematography on Pastrone's masterpiece of the Italian silent cinema, *Cabiria* (1914). Yet based on such pioneering films as his "machine-age comedy" *El Hotel Eléctrico* (1905) (the first use of pixillation anywhere, Hopewell claims), "Such were the Spaniard's innovations that Méliès could be dubbed 'the French Segundo de Chomón.'" (p. 10)

More important, Hopewell offers comprehensive coverage of the key issues and films that are most essential to understanding the distinctive qualities of the post-Franco cinema. For example, in covering *Raza* (*Race,* 1941), the extraordinarily successful film that was based on a novel written by Franco under a pseudonym, Hopewell perceptively observes: "Yet if *Raza* set the tone for films of the '40s (and indeed for much post-Franco cinema), it was not in style or ideology, but in its sense of an unconscious but consuming and structuring neurosis." (p. 34)

Hopewell's central goal is to define what is distinctively Spanish in this national cinema, and here he is much more thorough and insightful than Besas, although he limits himself primarily to thematic characteristics, genre and tone, paying little attention to aspects of visual style, iconography or narrative structure. This issue of national distinctiveness is crucial for Hopewell because he believes that it can possibly help to demarginalize Spanish cinema.

> What Spanish film-makers lack in 1986 is, in part, a sense of identity. The Italian cinema has its tradition of neo-realism; a young French director will return to the *nouvelle vague* in the 60s if only to discover his own position in a national film-making tradition. A Spanish director has no such sense of filmic heritage and, because of this few tags to act as selling points in the cultural supermarket of European cinema.

Where Hopewell is most impressive (both before and after Franco) is in his readings of the films against the larger historical, cultural, economic, and ideological forces that shaped them. Even though his analysis of these forces is rarely original, his use of this information is always intelligent, well-focused, persuasive, and highly illuminating. This strategy makes his discussion of a particular film seem significant even if you have never seen or heard of it—a distinctive advantage when treating the highly marginalized cinema of Spain for English-speaking readers. As a result, Hopewell tends to avoid the long lists of titles and tedious plot summaries that usually plague one-volume histories of a national cinema. Instead he chooses a structure that moves between chronology and thematic issues. Unfortunately, this structure occasionally leads to repetition, unevenness and even incoherence (especially in the final chapter). For example, he will take up a theme like violence or incest within a certain decade but then cite examples from succeeding and earlier periods. When he gets to the later period in a subsequent chapter, he tends to repeat the same points or, equally problematic, to omit the film entirely.

Hopewell's critical receptiveness is quite broad, so, unlike Besas, he is able to appreciate a wide range of styles and traditions within the Spanish cinema, yet he comes down hard on those "middle-brow" works that have such popular appeal outside of Spain and which Besas so admires—films like José Luis Garci's Oscar winning *Volver a empezar* (*To Begin Again,* 1982) and Mario Camus's *Los Santos Inocentes* (*The Holy Innocents,* 1984), which had such a long, successful run in the USA.

Los santos inocentes suggests another attempt to combine Spanish themes with American production values. In this it shares with other big-budget Spanish films of recent years the risk of contradictions. The film portrays a family living in squalor, but its polished camerawork creates an effect of picturesque poverty. . . . Above all, the moral scales of *Los santos inocentes* lack the intertonal subtleties of Berlanga and Buñuel. The film comes near to creating what for years Spanish film-makers have fought so hard to avoid: historical myths. (pp. 227–228)

The problem with the way Hopewell constructs this argument is that it sounds as if he is constructing a hierarchy of auteurs, in which serious artists like Buñuel and successful "directors of ability" like Berlanga lord over "middle-brows" like Garci and Camus. Never adequately conceptualizing the place of auteurism within the study of a national cinema, Hopewell tends to be defensive about his use of this approach, probably because he is mindful that most foreigners define Spanish cinema exclusively in terms of Buñuel and Saura. In a chapter called "New Directions" which deals with the post-Franco cinema, he writes:

The motor of change in cinema after Franco has come less from the film-makers themselves than from the moral and economic obligation to reach wider audiences, from the film industry crisis of the late 70s, and, when the state poured money into the film industry in the 80s, from the equal need to obtain state grants which allowed film-makers, ironically, largely to turn their backs on market forces.

Auteur analysis is thus even more inadequate a method of describing the modern Spanish cinema than it has proved for the cinema of most other countries. In talking of the films of the supposedly most individual of recent Spanish directors—Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón and Victor Erice—one has therefore to talk of 'Gutiérrez Aragón, Erice and their circumstances'. (p. 190)

What follows, however, is a perfectly conventional auteur analysis of these two Spanish filmmakers.

Only one chapter is devoted to a single auteur, and here Hopewell tries to justify his choice on political grounds.

The case of Carlos Saura is unique. He was the only director to claim under Franco, for example, that he controlled his films, and that, from *La caza,* "at every moment, I have done what I thought I could do." Saura insisted that he was an auteur. The claim seemed unlikely, even dangerous, when the Francoist censor so clearly interfered with personal expression in Spain. Yet Saura's career under Franco did suggest a consistently personal voice surviving from one film to the next.

Although Hopewell, in contrast to Besas, is very receptive to Saura's filmic experimentation, this chapter is one of his weakest, partly because its coverage is so limited. While certain key works like *La Caza* and *La Prima Angelica* have already been discussed in earlier chapters, other pivotal films like *Los Golfos* and *El Jardin de las Delicias* are omitted entirely. Of the films discussed in this chapter, Hopewell is particularly weak on *Elisa vida mia* and *Los ojos vendados.* His best visual analysis seems to be reserved for the films of Erice, while his extended analyses of a few films by Saura are particularly disappointing.

In the case of Buñuel, Hopewell is careful not to let him dominate, yet his name reverberates throughout the book like a powerful mantra. Even his chapter on the Spanish silent cinema strategically opens with a literary description of Buñuel's home village of Calanda as an example of "turn-of-the-century Spain." Even though Hopewell acknowledges that it's difficult to find direct evidence of Buñuel's influence on contemporary Spanish filmmakers, he focuses on the crucial connection between Buñuel and Saura, the two privileged auteurs.

It was a sense of Spanishness, added to an assimilation of Freud, which linked Saura to Buñuel. His discovery of Buñuel took place at the Recontres de Cinéma Hispanique at Montpellier. . . . "I saw the cinema of Buñuel, *El* and *Subida al cielo.* It was a fantastic solution for me: on the one hand it connected with a whole pre-Franco historical and cultural process; on the other, there was a man who worked on reality and a Spanish reality at that." (pp. 135–136)

Buñuel is a test case for Hopewell's central project of defining what is typically Spanish—an exile who carried this national heritage abroad wherever he worked and who won international recognition as a world-class auteur. Hopewell demonstrates that the qualities we normally associate with Buñuel—his "obsessive atheism," his peculiar "mixture of anticlericalism and a visceral fear of damnation," his unsentimental treatment of the crippled and poor, and his use of *esperpento* (that tradition of black absurdist humor that is best, defined by dramatist Ramón del Valle-Inclán)—are all quite typically Spanish. To support this argument, he quotes Buñuel.

"The critics talk about Goya," he once said, "because they ignore all the rest: Quevedo, St. Therese of Avila, the Spanish heterodoxes, the Spanish picaresque novel, Galdós, Valle-Inclán." The com-

mon strain connecting these writers is an urgent desire to disabuse Spaniards of illusions, whether carnal or material interests (the *desengaño* theme of the religious writers), pretensions of Golden Age Spaniards to grandeur, religiousness and wealth (the picaresque), *petit bourgeois* and provincial hypocrisy (Galdós), or more or less any pretense at all (Valle-Inclán). From the seventeenth century bathos, satire, sarcasm, parody and scorn become the dominant modes of Spain's best artists, influenced, no doubt, by the failure of Spain's greatest venture: its world-wide Empire. (p. 165)

In providing a highly accessible, intelligent reading of what is distinctively Spanish in the post-Franco cinema, Hopewell's *Out of the Past* may take an important step in helping to demarginalize Spanish cinema—at least in English-language film studies.

—MARSHA KINDER

THE PASSION OF INGMAR BERGMAN

By Frank Gado. Durham: Duke University Press, 1986. $45.00 cloth, $16.95 paper.

In large part, one suspects, because of the iron grip in which biographical criticism held Swedish academia until well into the 1960s, by far the most widely represented school in Ingmar Bergman criticism is that of biography cum explication de texte. A massive undertaking to which the author devoted 17 years of his life, *The Passion of Ingmar Bergman* is a contribution to that critical tradition in that it chronicles the life of Bergman and then proceeds to a chronological series of explications of the artist's production. This work is, however, a biography with a difference, that difference consisting of a lengthy chapter on Bergman as playwright (a subject hitherto almost completely neglected) and of a consistent and rewarding examination of the relationship between the theater director and the film auteur, the latter comprising a major contribution to our understanding of this relatively rare creative combination. In order to do his subject justice, Gado has spared no pains in attempting to assemble all the available data on his subject, including extensive correspondence with the director's sister and first wife. Indeed, the purely biographical research of this volume is meticulous.

More problematic is the critical approach Gado has adopted: he examines all Bergman's works as ramifications of his "recurring psychosexual drama" (p. 418) with its roots in oedipal conflict, arguing that "concealment of the dream machinery beneath the art it produces occurs almost everywhere in Bergman" (p. 179). Although art is indisputably the product of a particular individual consciousness and reflects aspects of the artist's mental and emotional preoccupations, an approach such as Gado's neglects the other major aspect of art, its communicative function, its attempt to affect a public which cares and knows but little about the personal demons that haunt the artist. For if art is nothing more than confession and therapy for its creator, then it becomes mere solipsism and we are left with a humanistic enterprise robbed of its humanism. The distorting influence of this view leads Gado into some quite remarkable examples of misprision. For instance, the author's contention that the infant Mikael in *The Seventh Seal* "corresponds to Bergman's recurrent fantasy of . . . returning to the womb" (p. 209) may be true or not, but it seems irrelevant to Mikael's central function as a Christ-like embodiment of the hope of futurity. Gado goes on to reconstruct the intentionally nonsense statement on the blackboard of Isak's examination nightmare in *Wild Strawberries,* in a manner calculated to make any linguist shudder, so that it reads "[My] illicit desire for mother cannot free itself of father's claims [on her]" (p. 223). But the very point of the statement is that it is nonsense which neither Isak nor we can decipher so that we share the protagonist's perception of the terrifying and inexplicable events which surround him. The boy Johan in *The Silence* would like, in Gado's interpretation, to become a dwarf so that "the sexual threat that looms over him would be disarmed" (p. 301), but playing with dwarfs is no more evidence of wanting to become one than playing with wooden blocks means one wants to become a wooden block. And furthermore we must wonder how becoming a dwarf would disarm a sexual threat; does Gado mean to imply that dwarfs have no sexuality or do not lead sexual lives? He argues too that the major thrust of *Persona* is "the childhood memory of maternal rejection" (p. 343). Although maternal rejection is treated in the film, it is not the major thrust but rather a secondary ramification of only one of the two major complementary issues of human and filmic identity. The author also maintains that in *Cries and*

mon strain connecting these writers is an urgent desire to disabuse Spaniards of illusions, whether carnal or material interests (the *desengaño* theme of the religious writers), pretensions of Golden Age Spaniards to grandeur, religiousness and wealth (the picaresque), *petit bourgeois* and provincial hypocrisy (Galdós), or more or less any pretense at all (Valle-Inclán). From the seventeenth century bathos, satire, sarcasm, parody and scorn become the dominant modes of Spain's best artists, influenced, no doubt, by the failure of Spain's greatest venture: its world-wide Empire. (p. 165)

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Whispers the moist red membrane which Bergman has expressly equated with the human soul "signifies the self's oedipal guilt" (p. 408). This statement might be of interest (if it were true) to readers concerned with the author's psyche but it is surely irrelevant to a better understanding or appreciation of a film in which none of the four major characters exhibits any oedipal tie to any father whatsoever, for the sisters' father is never even mentioned. Too, the struggle of the child protagonist in *Fanny and Alexander* is for Gado that of child against father for sexual acceptance by the mother, but again we see no evidence in the film that Alexander is sexually attracted to his mother; indeed their relationship seems "healthy" in every way. This reviewer's argument with Gado's critical method, then, is less that it is wrong (although it is certainly limited, as is obvious from his refusal to consider the important statements about art as art rather than art as "dream machinery" made both visually and verbally throughout Bergman's production) than that it is uninteresting and irrelevant to the films themselves. Psychology does not great art make, a recognition that the author himself acknowledges in his statement that "form is ultimately meaning" (p. 186). By refusing to account for the medium in which Bergman is working, by persistently ignoring the visual artistry of this most supremely visual film-maker, Gado undermines his own credibility as a critic. "It is absurd," he argues, "to confine [oneself] to a grammar of images" (p. xiii), but precisely because he refuses to deal with the films as something we *see* (and hear) he falls into the trap of concluding that *Persona* depicts "art destroying the very possibility of being" (p. xvii) and is "a nihilistic explosion of reality" (p. 295), whereas the very point of the film's self-conscious aesthetics is that a state of "Being" can be achieved through the intercession of the filmic image.

That the author's critical methodology is his own worst enemy is further manifest in the fact that when he departs from it and simply concentrates on the film before him, he demonstrates no mean critical acumen. His ability to examine non-Freudian symbol clusters and delineate their various nuances is admirable; the treatments of Bergman's use of clothes, masks, mirrors, and animals are both rich and rewarding. Especially noteworthy in this connection is his analysis of temporal images (clocks, watches, seasons, tolling bells) which represents a significant contribution to an understanding of the works of this most time- (and death-) conscious director.

But what is most disturbing in terms of the book's scholarly credibility (as opposed to its intellectual soundness) is the unprofessional documentation. In a work of this magnitude, with its pretensions towards being an all-encompassing treatment of a film-maker's entire production, the reader expects that the author will take into account significant previous scholarship. But of the perhaps most important four or five Bergman studies ever written, Gado seems ignorant of two and gives two others very short shrift indeed. Nowhere does he mention Bruce Kawin's revelatory study of Bergman's narrative mode or Göran Persson's excellent two-part study of the trilogy (one suspects in the latter case that Gado's limited knowledge of the Scandinavian languages may be the reason: he translates "nej lika" in Alma's babbling in *Persona* as though it were one word—coming up with "carnation" rather than "no . . . like"). One might assume that Gado's exclusion of Kawin and Persson derived from a wish either not to be quarrelsome or not to promote what he views as insufficient-quality work, if it were not for the fact that he speaks of other critics both snidely and condescendingly. One can only conclude that he does not know these works. While it is, of course, true that one reader's excellent critic is another reader's fool, surely these two works have achieved the status of required reading among all serious Bergman critics. Furthermore, John Simon's stunning visual analysis of four Bergman films is quoted only once and of Birgitta Steene's three books and myriad articles, Gado seems familiar with only one.

Given the fact that he can provide fine perceptive insights into the workings of the films, it is unfortunate that Gado did not develop a more balanced critical attitude, for these insights are all too often obscured by the pervasive reductionist methodology with which the author critically strong-arms Bergman's films in order to extort a kind of Freudian ransom from them. This Freudian approach may provide us with interesting information about Bergman but it fails the films, however well it may treat Bergman and his psyche, by bringing exterior categories to bear on them; for the films pos-

sess, most critics would surely agree, a lasting value as art works independent of the artist's psychological make-up. Gado, then, devalues the films, demoting them to the status of personal confession in a way that deprives them of their import as artistic and cultural artifacts.

—MARILYN JOHNS BLACKWELL

CINEMA OF PARADOX
French Filmmaking Under the German Occupation

By Evelyn Ehrlich. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. $25.00.

Too many film history books contain interesting, sometimes compelling examples of film criticism, offer scattered new judgments of the important events, influences, and artistic landmarks which they survey, but do not call into question accepted narrative accounts inherited from previous writers, or enshrined in the yellowing pages of old film periodicals. For many writers, "primary sources" mean selected information from *Variety,* or from *La Cinématographie Française,* or the like, plus interviews with film artists. But while film periodicals are excellent places to start historical research, journalistic material is by definition carefully shaped and worked before publication, often in terms of agendas that become less and less obvious with the passage of time. Interviews are also useful, but one must always keep in mind that people don't necessarily remember correctly, or even always tell the truth. For example, Abel Gance always maintained that he was the son of a "Dr. Gance" and grew up in a respectable bourgeois home; Roger Icart, using *real* primary sources such as birth records and apartment registers, has revealed the great director's illegitimate birth and troubled, nomadic childhood. Works such as Icart's monumental and authoritative study of Gance are rare, and for good reason: it takes incredible amounts of time, patience, and sometimes sheer luck to establish a credible version of the events involved in the creation of a single feature film. To the small shelf of books that carefully investigate how much of the accepted accounts of a given period or film community will stand up to careful scrutiny can be added Evelyn Ehrlich's masterly study of French film-making during the years of the German Occupation. It is one of the best and most useful works of film history to have been published in recent years.

Most historians have assumed that Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels's widely cited view that the French film industry had to be kept from growing too strong artistically or financially accurately represented or guided German government policy in France during the Occupation. Once one assumes this, the fact that the industry survived, and prospered, can seem a kind of triumph in the face of overwhelming odds. And this is, indeed, the view promulgated in interviews and memoirs by directors such as Marcel Carné, producers like Roger Richebé, and many others. Ehrlich has asked the question: was this really the way things were? The documents necessary to investigate the question have been available since shortly after the war's end, in microfilms of captured Nazi reports from the German embassy in Paris, where the *Filmsprüfstelle* (Film Control Board) regulated the life of the French industry. Ehrlich's parents spent five months patiently reading, summarizing, and translating parts of the weekly summaries from the *Filmsprüfstelle,* from microfilms in the US National Archives (clearly they deserve some sort of medal for this). Thanks to this comprehensive research, their daughter has been able to demonstrate that the German policy was to encourage the French industry to make exactly the sorts of films that it did. The Germans wanted to keep the French population reasonably content, of course, and this entailed adequate entertainment, but beyond that the *Filmsprüfstelle* saw other, long-term uses of the French filmmakers' efforts. French films were to serve as evidence of the benefits of the "New Europe" brought about by Nazi rule. And it was also envisioned that prestige productions such as Carné and Prevert's *The Night Visitors* could help the Germans break into lucrative Third World markets, most notably South America, where American films had almost complete hegemony. Little of this came to pass, for the war began to turn against Germany just at the point that the French industry was fully revived, but German policy was nonetheless fully in support of the "quality" French cinema that developed during the Occupation and continued (as Ehrlich argues, and I agree) after the liberation. Ehrlich also convincingly establishes that the

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Nazi authorities had little concern for hidden, allegorical messages in the films that were produced. Real censorship problems typically came from the Vichy authorities, not from the occupiers. The claims of film-makers that they were in some way "resisting" the oppressor by making the kind of films that they did ring very hollow in the context of this new, ironically positive view of the Germans' role.

This striking reinterpretation of the circumstances of film production during the Occupation is far from the only noteworthy aspect of *Cinema of Paradox.* Ehrlich also provides a clear, comprehensive picture of the industry from the film-makers' point of view, accounts of the kinds of films that were produced, and an overview of the activities of COIC, the Vichy-created organ of industry self-regulation. There is less surprising material in all of this, thanks to the precedents of Paul Léglise's *Histoire de la politique du cinéma français* (Vol. II) and Roger Régent's classic *Cinéma de France,* but Ehrlich presents the material clearly and forcefully. Even scholars familiar with Léglise, Régent, and the many others who have recently written on the period will find Ehrlich's overview useful. Aside from the material on German activities and policies, the other part of the book that offers a view of the period qualitatively different from previous studies is its rhetorical analysis of the "prestige" films of the Occupation—which made Goebbels so unhappy and the French artists so proud. Most of the films of the Occupation, as Ehrlich is quick to point out, were little different from the films of the 1930s, apart from the obvious change that the tone and circumstances of everyday life receded a bit (but these had never been all that prominent in the ordinary genre picture of any period). However, the "prestige" film changed enormously with the coming of the Occupation. Ehrlich calls the period's 30 or so most visible and discussed films of the period a "cinema of isolation," and offers an analysis of what makes them different from their ("A" picture) counterparts from the years before the war. Among other things, she argues that two strong formal tendencies can be discerned: a trend toward "pictorialism," whereby text, characterization, and other narrative elements are subordinated to stylized compositions of the images (and, one might add, to stylization of the sound track in works like Grémillon's *Lumière d'été*); and a trend towards "creating emotional distance between spectator and subject," a distance often perfectly expressed by the generally greater physical distance of characters from the camera. (She also points out that both tendencies are inflected by production circumstances, with film in short supply and extensive rehearsal and pre-planning necessary for works which, previously, might have involved greater use of improvisation.)

Ehrlich's argument about the aesthetic shape of the new "French school of cinema" is subtle and wide-ranging. I can only urge that it be read in full, and register one point of disagreement. She argues that very little in the cinema of the 1930s served as precedent for the Occupation "cinema of isolation," and this is largely true. But precedents can be found, I think, if one turns away from Renoir, Feyder, Duvivier, and the other "great directors" of the period and looks instead at French works by *emigré* artists such as Max Ophuls, G. W. Pabst, and Anatole Litvak. Also, as Ehrlich points out, American cinema (though banned) had great influence, and one can also argue that the pictorialist bent of the Occupation cinema is anticipated in many French "poetic realist" films such as Chenal's *Crime and Punishment.* In other words, all the "bad objects," the films that one could not see, denounced by Vichy and the Nazis alike as "decadent," might have seemed irresistibly attractive models for film-makers wishing subtly to assert their independence. Ehrlich has perhaps argued too forcefully for a complete break between the 1930s and the Occupation. But I find that in stating my own position about the threads of continuity that may be found I remain in Ehrlich's debt, so useful is her analysis of the "cinema of isolation." This is a book that poses important questions, offers significant responses to them, and allows the reader some latitude to disagree with its conclusions. It is also clearly and at times beautifully written, and it is unafraid to take carefully considered moral stands in a domain of history where many scholars are too quick to condemn and offer only vituperation, and others too anxious to turn away and refuse judgment.

—ALAN WILLIAMS

DOSTOEVSKY AND SOVIET FILM
Visions of Demonic Realism

By N. M. Lary. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987. $24.95.

Film-makers East and West, from the days of the silents to the present, have been fascinated by Dostoevsky. Robert Wiene's *Raskolnikow* (1923) was among the *Schauerfilme* of early German cinema. Joseph von Sternberg did a Hollywood *Crime and Punishment* in 1935, while Kurosawa adapted *The Idiot (Hakuchi)* in 1951. Andrej Wajda, continuing his attack on revolutionary ideas and political extremism—witness his *Danton* (1982)—of course selected Dostoevsky's most powerful antirevolutionary novel, *The Possessed* (also translated as *The Demons*), as the basis for his most recent film, as yet unreleased. Even Michael Cimino, intrigued by an unwieldy script he read based on Dostoevsky's own dramatic and harassed life, commissioned and got a rewritten screenplay from Raymond Carver and Tess Gallagher in 1982, but it was never produced. Many more efforts could be listed.

At first sight, Dostoevsky and film are a natural combination. His novels and stories are thick with melodrama, vivid characters, plot twists, passion, sin. The urban milieu, the cliff-hanging episodes, the murders, suicides, violence, even the whodunit in Dostoevsky offer large potential for a whole array of *films noirs.* And yet there are few memorable Dostoevsky films. (Kurosawa's *Hakuchi*? Robert Bresson's 1971 adaptation of *White Nights?*) As Lary points out in this excellent study, Dostoevsky's stylistic repertory requires a special feel and lots of risks in order to transfer his writing to film. Dostoevsky's "carnivalization" of everyday life (Bakhtin), the nervous, feverish prose, the interior monologues and thought processes, the philosophical discourses, and especially those disorienting dabs of the grotesque on a seemingly naturalist canvas all spell trouble for the film-maker.

The Soviets, usually the most adept at bringing their own Russian literary classics to the screen (think of some of their wonderful Chekhov), have been especially disappointing in their Dostoevsky output. There is reason to hope that *glasnost* will have some impact here, but until now Soviet directors have worked under a double burden that has cramped their vision of Dostoevsky. Stylistically, the canons of Socialist Realism ruled out complexity: the grotesque had to be sanitized into the naturalist. Ideologically, the cult of optimism and collective triumph over social maladies ruled out Dostoevsky's doubts, his preoccupation with Evil and his care for the individual soul: the theology had to be sanitized into "critical realism." Soviet film-makers have had the devil of a time trying to exorcise Dostoevsky's demons.

These encounters between the Soviet film world and the nineteenth-century master are chronicled well and interestingly in the book by Lary. The author is a professor of Humanities and English at York University in Toronto and also knows the Russian language; he is familiar with Soviet film and literary aesthetics, and has drawn on archival materials not available in the West. Twenty photos and stills, along with translated excerpts from a variety of sources—e.g., sections of Eisenstein's unpublished "Chapter on Dostoevsky"—enhance the volume. *Dostoevsky and Soviet Film* is rewarding as film history, as film theory, and as a glimpse into Soviet culture and Soviet cultural politics.

The first Soviet Dostoevsky production was *House of the Dead* (1932), scripted by the multi-talented formalist critic, Viktor Shklovsky, and directed by the not-so-talented Vasily Fedorov. How the film turned out and how it was received portended the recurring problem of Dostoevsky in Soviet cinema. Fedorov toned down the "ambiguous, subversive, inwardly divided Dostoevsky that Shklovsky wanted," but the film was denounced for "formalism" anyway. Grigory Roshal's *Petersburg Night* (1934), was notable for some interesting expressionistic motifs, but it also conventionalized Dostoevsky into a Socialist Realist pattern, a habit that would peak with the work of Ivan Pyriev, "the most determined popularizer of Dostoevsky in Soviet film." (*The Idiot,* Part I, 1958, and *The Brothers Karamazov,* Parts I and II, 1968–1969.) The last Soviet Dostoevsky, a sentimental and ordinary effort, was made by the veteran director Alexander Zarkhi, *Twenty-six days in the Life of Dostoevsky* (1980), based on *The Gambler* and on the author's desperate attempt to complete that novel on deadline.

Some of Lary's most imaginative (and occasionally murky) pages are devoted to suggesting the influence of Dostoevsky's demonic visions on three directors who never filmed his work

but were inspired by it. Lary interprets Fridrikh Ermler's film about the purported conspiracies that led to the great purges, *The Great Citizen,* Part II (1939), as an unacknowledged inversion of *The Possessed.* In that novel Dostoevsky had portrayed the revolutionary conspirators as if possessed by demons. Ermler turned this idea inside out by assigning the demons to those who conspired against Stalin and the Revolution. I'm not sure there is evidence that Ermler deliberately modelled the film this way, but Lary makes a plausible case. (The added—Dostoevskian?—twist is that the real conspiracy of those terrible years was engineered against the innocents by Stalin's security organs.) Eisenstein, who actually proposed a film based on *The Brothers Karamazov* in 1943, was, according to Lary, deeply influenced by rereading Dostoevsky in framing his tragic conception of Ivan the Terrible. The same may be said of Grigory Kozintsev in relation to his *King Lear* (1971). Kozintsev, "the survivor," is a kind of hero of Lary's book. Having witnessed the horrors of Stalinism and Nazism, Kozintsev came to appreciate Dostoevsky's obsession with the problem of Evil in the world and understood the need for an appropriate, subversive art that, like Dostoevsky's, would shatter the comfortable conventions of naturalism.

This art would also mean shattering the conventions of Socialist Realism. Lary has an illuminating section on a film that was suppressed upon completion in 1965, Alexander Alov and Vladimir Naumov's *A Nasty Story,* based on a Dostoevsky tale. The attempt to capture the grotesque and uneasy quality of the original was too much for the film bosses, despite the comparatively liberalized atmosphere of the time. (Lary also speculates that the film carried a decidedly critical, antiauthority message.) In this regard, it is striking to learn from recent reports that the "Conflicts Commission" created by the Fifth Congress of Soviet Cinematographers in 1986, has approved the release of *A Nasty Story.* Incidentally, Elem Klimov, who was elected head of the Union at that Congress, has, according to Lary, long wanted to film *The Possessed.* Perhaps *glasnost* in Soviet society will at last pave the way for an open and genuine confrontation between Dostoevsky and Soviet cinema. Or would it be a *reunion*? The results may surprise us.

—LOUIS MENASHE

MYTH, RACE AND POWER

By Keyan Tomaselli, Alan Williams, Lynette Steenveld, and Ruth Tomaselli. Bellville, South Africa: Anthropos Publishers, 1986.

WRITING CULTURE
The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography

Edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. $9.95 paper.

These two books seek to study the enterprise of ethnography as a form of textual production and reception. Placing itself beneath a scientific mantle, ethnography (particularly ethnographic writing) has achieved a degree of immunity from the forms of textual criticism that are commonplace in the scrutiny of fictive texts. And yet, as both these volumes demonstrate, the ethnographic enterprise does not merely, on occasion, have a slight tinge of the political, the subjective or personal, the allegorical or ideological about it—such elements are inextricable aspects of the ethnographic enterprise.

Like film study, ethnography has emerged as an academic discipline only by fighting a number of border wars; this colors the tone of much discussion and gives added meaning to the institutional dimensions of the term "discipline." Travel writing, for example, has been to written ethnography what the travelogue and spectacles like *Mondo Cane* have been to filmed ethnography, and much effort goes to discrediting it. In South Africa, ethnography has itself often been a vehicle for state-supported views of racial hierarchy and racist views of cultural difference. *Myth, Race and Power* hopes to deprive such representations of at least some of their power by exposing the ways in which their image of the Other has been fabricated at the expense of the Other. The book develops criteria for an ethnographic film which it then uses to demonstrate how many state-sponsored films fail to meet them. (Extended discussion is given to *They Came From the East,* a 1976 South African Broadcasting Corporation documentary on the Indian population of South Africa, as well as *Testament to the Bushman, N!ai: Story of a !Kung Woman,* and others. *N!ai* happens to include a scene in which a white film crew trains !Kung people to play a fictitious arrival scene. This scene turns out to be the ending of *The Gods Must Be Crazy.* Tomaselli et

but were inspired by it. Lary interprets Fridrikh Ermler's film about the purported conspiracies that led to the great purges, *The Great Citizen,* Part II (1939), as an unacknowledged inversion of *The Possessed.* In that novel Dostoevsky had portrayed the revolutionary conspirators as if possessed by demons. Ermler turned this idea inside out by assigning the demons to those who conspired against Stalin and the Revolution. I'm not sure there is evidence that Ermler deliberately modelled the film this way, but Lary makes a plausible case. (The added—Dostoevskian?—twist is that the real conspiracy of those terrible years was engineered against the innocents by Stalin's security organs.) Eisenstein, who actually proposed a film based on *The Brothers Karamazov* in 1943, was, according to Lary, deeply influenced by rereading Dostoevsky in framing his tragic conception of Ivan the Terrible. The same may be said of Grigory Kozintsev in relation to his *King Lear* (1971). Kozintsev, "the survivor," is a kind of hero of Lary's book. Having witnessed the horrors of Stalinism and Nazism, Kozintsev came to appreciate Dostoevsky's obsession with the problem of Evil in the world and understood the need for an appropriate, subversive art that, like Dostoevsky's, would shatter the comfortable conventions of naturalism.

This art would also mean shattering the conventions of Socialist Realism. Lary has an illuminating section on a film that was suppressed upon completion in 1965, Alexander Alov and Vladimir Naumov's *A Nasty Story,* based on a Dostoevsky tale. The attempt to capture the grotesque and uneasy quality of the original was too much for the film bosses, despite the comparatively liberalized atmosphere of the time. (Lary also speculates that the film carried a decidedly critical, antiauthority message.) In this regard, it is striking to learn from recent reports that the "Conflicts Commission" created by the Fifth Congress of Soviet Cinematographers in 1986, has approved the release of *A Nasty Story.* Incidentally, Elem Klimov, who was elected head of the Union at that Congress, has, according to Lary, long wanted to film *The Possessed.* Perhaps *glasnost* in Soviet society will at last pave the way for an open and genuine confrontation between Dostoevsky and Soviet cinema. Or would it be a *reunion*? The results may surprise us.

—LOUIS MENASHE

MYTH, RACE AND POWER

By Keyan Tomaselli, Alan Williams, Lynette Steenveld, and Ruth Tomaselli. Bellville, South Africa: Anthropos Publishers, 1986.

WRITING CULTURE
The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography

Edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. $9.95 paper.

These two books seek to study the enterprise of ethnography as a form of textual production and reception. Placing itself beneath a scientific mantle, ethnography (particularly ethnographic writing) has achieved a degree of immunity from the forms of textual criticism that are commonplace in the scrutiny of fictive texts. And yet, as both these volumes demonstrate, the ethnographic enterprise does not merely, on occasion, have a slight tinge of the political, the subjective or personal, the allegorical or ideological about it—such elements are inextricable aspects of the ethnographic enterprise.

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al. do not discuss this, but when shown together *N!ai* proves to be a devastating deconstruction of *The Gods.*) This strategy allows the authors to mount telling critiques without any need to invoke a Marxist or revolutionary perspective: a scientific one is sufficient to undermine the credibility of the films and television works they examine.

Writing Culture addresses its critique to the aura of science itself. This aura has exonerated ethnographic writing from textual scrutiny since, like the realist film image, the traditional ethnography presents itself as a transparency of the culture it describes. The book's authors, though, insist that a rhetoric informs such "zero-degree" writing just as it does the zero-degree realism of classic film texts. This debate is familiar to us in film study, and has influenced much writing on documentary. Although *Writing Culture* speaks only of written ethnography, it does so within the framework of a poststructural critique that can help invigorate the parallel debates about the production of the documentary text. One paper particularly, Mary Pratt's analysis of the tension between the voice of personal and scientific authority ("Fieldwork in Common Places"), points to the unstable, paradoxical ground on which this whole enterprise rests.

As a discipline, ethnography raises the issue of authority in a variety of ways, including the need to discipline the ethnographer who strays from the accepted modes of representation as well as the need to justify the very concept of a them/us dichotomy in which "we" have license to allegorize about "them." The indigenous ethnographer, the informant whose voice stands alongside the ethnographer's rather than being subsumed inside it, the call to heteroglossia and historical specificity as ways to break the drift toward the essentializing tendencies of what Edward Said has characterized as "Orientalism," a tendency that extends far beyond the Orient, with particularly virulent manifestations in the racist practices of South Africa—all these developments attest to a sharpened awareness of the risks and hazards of speaking about, and for, the Other as well the urgent need to do so in forms that question authority and share responsibility. Not only in some experimental written texts but also in film works such as *Reassemblage* by Trinh Minh Ha, the MacDougalls' Turkana trilogy, and Keyan Tomaselli's *On Becoming a Sangoma,* these developments have begun to take textual form and now invite a new round of textual critique that may be less deconstructive than contingent and participatory. —BILL NICHOLS

POPULAR FILM CULTURE IN FASCIST ITALY

By James Hay. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. $37.50 cloth, $14.95 paper.

This thoughtful, ambitious book takes cues from two sources familiar to film study and from several others that may not be. The old friends (or enemies) are Kracauer's German opus and Fellini's *Amarcord.* Like *From Caligari to Hitler, Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy* directs itself toward twenties and thirties movies produced under regimes whose leverages on national public sensibility are read in images and in story contrivances. *Amarcord,* a kind of leitmotif throughout the text, supplies a time frame, candid and unmystified perceptions of old events, and a series of sites: the town movie theater, the Fascist rally, the photographer, the Grand Hotel.

Most films described in Kracauer's book were and remain old acquaintances. Further, Kracauer drew on studies of German character and culture by social scientists like Max Horkheimer and Erich Fromm which supplied convenient frames of reference, supporting propositions about authoritarianism, national repressions, and anxieties. In contrast, Hay is leery of notions about pervasive, monolithic systems. "Totalitarian," for him, is "a somewhat outmoded, reductive and pejorative term from political science." (234) Rather, Italian film's popular culture suggests to Hay a running series of ambivalences and contradictions —options whose totality made up a mythic world within which Italian audiences imaged themselves, foreigners, the past, and the future.

Hay's referents include Louis Althusser; Roland Barthes; Jacque Ellul, *The Political Illusion;* Alvin Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology;* and Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man.* To Hay's credit, he underlines the differences among his various sources—between, say, Louis Althusser's postulation of a

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Repressive State Apparatus and Clifford Geertz, in *The Interpretation of Cultures,* who emphasizes the contradictory aspects of emerging political ideologies. (235) Together, the many citations constitute less than a coordinated vision, but almost all of them conceptualize a system in which popular imagery mediates public perceptions and social-political realities. Artifacts of the times, films assume the role of historical documents testifying to unexpected dimensions of public consensus and to complex cultural encodings.

The book follows a succession of spaces and images, each characterized by a particular group of films: the Grand Hotel, imported American product and its role in stereotyping, department stores, rural-urban confrontations, historical films, colonial films, documentaries. A young Vittorio De Sica figures in several titles which support the author's theses, but most of the films discussed are themselves little-known to American audiences, so that a reader's faith in Hay's close textual interpretations has to be more or less absolute.

The films he cites evidence a substantial range of subject matter, class, profession, characterization, and plotting. Unlike Nazi Germany under Goebbels and UFA, Italian Fascism did not assume direct manipulation of the film industry (exceptions are the newsreel and documentary), but merely pressed for competitive zeal against the dominant American product, although Hay does emphasize the fact that political bureaucracy grew as a factor in thirties production. Entertainment film falls under no rubric of "Fascist style," but rather displays popular states of mind that are often unresolved. How shall the playgrounds of the rich (the Grand Hotels) be perceived? Which images from American imports translate intact into Italian facsimiles? Which ones shift parameters so that vice replicates virtue? How can department stores and city offices accommodate rural dispositions? Can "country values" prevail over technological innovation and new city ways? How are the Holy Roman Empire, the Renaissance, and the Risorgimento likened to Mussolini's regime? How does African colonization promote Fascism while exposing some of its contradictions? The answers are surprisingly varied.

Finally Hay explicates the designs of specific newsreels, prepared under LUCE, the center of state-controlled educational film production, and describes some of LUCE's documentaries. Here the emphasis rests on selection and juxtaposition. Mussolini appears as movie star, a strongman in the tradition of Maciste, mounted in a variety of roles. However organized in support of political ends, documentaries increasingly foreshadow some of the formal conventions of neorealism. *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy* merits careful study.

—JOHN FELL

THE SOCIAL CINEMA OF JEAN RENOIR

Christopher Faulkner. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986. $25.00.

This is an important, provocative book. It argues that Renoir's films "cannot be aggregated to form one indivisible 'master' film expressing a single 'vision' or world-view without the severest critical and historical distortions." By extension, "there is no transhistorical . . . essential Renoir personality that is the univocal source and measure of value for every (film) indiscriminately." In particular, there is "no real continuity among Renoir's films of the French thirties, the American forties and the European fifties"; "there is instead an epistemological and ideological rupture" among these which entails "a radical change for the social function of art and the role of the artist-intellectual."

Christopher Faulkner in other words throws down the gauntlet to auteurist approaches to Renoir, which are, as he knows (his bibliography is extensive) many and varied. Alexander Sesonske seems to be first in a line of fire that is anything but scattershot: Bazin, Truffaut, Braudy, and Durgnat do not emerge unscathed. But like many who invoke the concept of the "epistemological break," Faulkner for some unspecified reason supposes that so dramatic a shift can happen only once, even when his own evidence suggests otherwise. What happens before the "rupture" emerges in this book more clearly than what happens after it. Unsurprisingly, only Renoir's French films of the thirties (and not all of these) "respond directly to historical conditions" and "articulate values in the culture and society of the time rather than some presumed Renoir world-view." If, by contrast, Renoir had made only the American

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films of the forties, "his work would have been forgotten . . . Their critical defense has been based on stylistic or thematic links with various of the (earlier) French films, as part of the effort to preserve the unity of the *oeuvre* and the notion of a unified authorial consciousness." To dispense with such unwanted notions is to acknowledge that these American films "have not much in common with one another," let alone with Renoir's earlier ones, and that later still, during the fifties, Renoir is quite simply "no longer interested in representing social reality"; "what is signified" in these last films "is Renoir's own art, . . . his fascination with . . . the space of performance."

Faulkner in saying this obviously has a point. But what exactly is it? His book delineates more than one "rupture" in Renoir's career. Renoir's eventual *retour aux sources,* to the France of his childhood, which may be encountered in the biography of his father and his novel, *Les Cahiers du capitaine Georges* as well as his films of the fifties, may have been as abrupt a break from his American experiences as these had been from his more politically conscious prewar French films. Indeed, Faulkner's own evidence and approach suggest that the needed periodization may be more complicated even than this. In one of his book's many fascinating intellectual moves, Faulkner, instead of positing a crudely geographical division between the French and the American Renoir, points out in a telling discussion of *This Land is Mine* that Mory, the Charles Laughton character, is in significant respects a continuation of Octave in *La Règle du jeu,* just as von Keller is an extension of von Rauffenstein in *La Grande Illusion.*

Faulkner's account of *This Land is Mine,* a film which is usually passed over in embarrassed silence as one of Renoir's summary failures, is the best I have read. But *The Social Cinema of Jean Renoir* is a book that bristles with often unexpected insights and *aperçus,* and also a book that is capable of being crudely dismissive of films that appear not to fit. (*Swamp Water,* for instance, is seen as "banal" and uninteresting; but within Faulkner's own terms of reference, is it any less "American" than *The Southerner*?) Faulkner is of course perfectly at liberty to privilege some films over others, and as it is his book covers a surprisingly large amount of territory in its 198 pages of text. But selectivity can turn into unevenness all too easily, a lesson Faulkner could have learned readily enough from the auteurist approaches he is concerned to undermine.

But as things stand, Faulkner takes his cue from the very auteurist approaches he (often rightly) disparages. This means that this book is not for the curious beginner; its interpretation of Renoir—uneven and fascinating as it is—can be evaluated not just alongside but only *through* those of its rivals, which in the nature of things is a real drawback even for the dedicated student. In the end, even though Faulkner's bibliography alone would justify the purchase of his book, his book itself is closer to the provocative reinterpretation than to the major book. It is a challenge. Faulkner has thrown down a gauntlet that has to be picked up. But his book provokes more than it characterizes. —PAUL THOMAS

MISUNDERSTANDING MEDIA

By Brian Winston. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Brian Winston's *Misunderstanding Media* is, roughly, the *Das Kapital* of McLuhan bashing. In the book's multitudinous tightly packed and thoroughly researched pages, Winston carefully ferrets from the history, pre-history, and post-history of communications technology an intellectual construct that he then posits as the death knell of technological determinism.

What replaces our happy faith in the exponential growth of scientifically induced happiness is a model based around what Winston calls The Law of the Suppression of Radical Potential. The Law tells us that nothing anyone invents will see the light of day until there is a general consensus among the political and economic elite that this new thing will not impinge upon their privileges.

The Law according to Winston is the last stage of a process of discovery that begins when a general scientific competence produces the "ideation" of a technological development. Thus, the hit-and-miss experimentation with phosphors that Winston traces to 1602 eventually allows one Monsieur Senlecq to propose the fundamentals of television in 1877. There follows a long series of prototype inventions, each lacking a fundamental component of the work-

films of the forties, "his work would have been forgotten . . . Their critical defense has been based on stylistic or thematic links with various of the (earlier) French films, as part of the effort to preserve the unity of the *oeuvre* and the notion of a unified authorial consciousness." To dispense with such unwanted notions is to acknowledge that these American films "have not much in common with one another," let alone with Renoir's earlier ones, and that later still, during the fifties, Renoir is quite simply "no longer interested in representing social reality"; "what is signified" in these last films "is Renoir's own art, . . . his fascination with . . . the space of performance."

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able technology. Hence, the proto-televisions of 1881 to 1925. Then—only after the intervention of a clearly understood social purpose—comes a breakthrough. Vladimir Zworkin in 1923 and Philo T. Farnsworth in 1927 give us the real thing.

The next 20 years are governed by Winston's Law. The diffusion of television is frozen while power brokers determine its standards and uses. When the invention is at last mass-marketed after World War II, these questions have been resolved with a finality that determines all future formats and spin-offs.

In addition to television, Winston applies his model to telephones, computers, and satellite communications. In all these cases, he postulates a societal intervention that first prompts the actual invention and then delays its application. We could have had telephones in the 1820s and microcomputers in the 1950s. We (or at least the Nazis) might have initiated satellite broadcasting in 1944.

It would take a science historian of Winston's considerable energies to refute the factual bases of these assertions. But it might simply require a shrug of the shoulders to suggest that the societal interventions he observes are not exactly news. Few consumers could afford television in the 1930s while nations as a whole could not see it as a priority during World War II. The public's delay in adopting the telephone circa 1820 might well have been motivated by the upheavals of mid-nineteenth-century industrialization—after 14 hours in the cotton mills, the average teenager would have been too tired to use the thing. If technologies were delayed by corporate and governmental meddling, it might also be argued that these institutions were to some extent formed by the masses they were manipulating. Power elites are themselves the products of large-scale upheavals—some of which may have even been hastened by new technologies. Winston's Law would work better as Devil Theory if it allowed for a certain Faustian "potential" to its mass victims.

Still, *Misunderstanding Media* is more than a chicken responding to McLuhan's egg. A hardnosed British television journalist as well as a mass communications academic, Winston is convincing when he turns his feisty rhetoric on the correctly labeled "babble" of the blindly faithful techie. In the first pages of *Misunderstanding Media* he pinpoints the fate of our current electronic enthusiasms: the free transmission of signals will be curtailed by governments; new television hardware will not produce new content; videotext will not replace print; the telephone will never become a videophone; home computing will be a fad, then a hobby, or, at best, provide better typewriters for the rich. These, like the rest of Winston's introductory declarations, seem just about right.

At his very best, Winston expands his sobriety to a consideration of the scientific process itself. Progress is not, as cliché would have it, the qualitative result of quantitative growth in information. The intuitive individual inventor is alive today—as was collective experimentation 300 years ago. The actual use of information available will always be limited by the human ability to absorb it. Electronic technology will never have an impact more significant than the messages it carries.

These too are not new arguments. They represent, as always, the principal and most logical refutation to the blind pursuit of progress: not only doesn't progress solve everything but, as often as not, it isn't even progress. Humanity has the admirable habit of intermittently reminding itself that it is the measure of all things.

Certainly, the author of that other *Das Kapital* would feel at home as Winston systematically dismisses celebrations of "the information revolution." Revolution, the old man would agree, does not come from building the better mousetrap. It comes from an understanding of who is the mouse. —SETH FELDMAN

CHAPLINIANA: VOL. I, THE KEYSTONE FILMS

By Harry M. Geduld. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. $47.50

Commencing a three-volume series, Geduld bravely undertakes moment-to-moment commentaries on the first 35 of Chaplin's 81 total productions. Each film's credits include all the alternate English-language titles as well as those in French, German, Spanish, and Italian. Additionally, Geduld notes lengths of various versions. Where possible, he describes what's missing in shortened prints. (Because footage counts seem to vary so regularly, one wonders how far different intertitles might help to ac-

able technology. Hence, the proto-televisions of 1881 to 1925. Then—only after the intervention of a clearly understood social purpose—comes a breakthrough. Vladimir Zworkin in 1923 and Philo T. Farnsworth in 1927 give us the real thing.

The next 20 years are governed by Winston's Law. The diffusion of television is frozen while power brokers determine its standards and uses. When the invention is at last mass-marketed after World War II, these questions have been resolved with a finality that determines all future formats and spin-offs.

In addition to television, Winston applies his model to telephones, computers, and satellite communications. In all these cases, he postulates a societal intervention that first prompts the actual invention and then delays its application. We could have had telephones in the 1820s and microcomputers in the 1950s. We (or at least the Nazis) might have initiated satellite broadcasting in 1944.

It would take a science historian of Winston's considerable energies to refute the factual bases of these assertions. But it might simply require a shrug of the shoulders to suggest that the societal interventions he observes are not exactly news. Few consumers could afford television in the 1930s while nations as a whole could not see it as a priority during World War II. The public's delay in adopting the telephone circa 1820 might well have been motivated by the upheavals of mid-nineteenth-century industrialization—after 14 hours in the cotton mills, the average teenager would have been too tired to use the thing. If technologies were delayed by corporate and governmental meddling, it might also be argued that these institutions were to some extent formed by the masses they were manipulating. Power elites are themselves the products of large-scale upheavals—some of which may have even been hastened by new technologies. Winston's Law would work better as Devil Theory if it allowed for a certain Faustian "potential" to its mass victims.

Still, *Misunderstanding Media* is more than a chicken responding to McLuhan's egg. A hardnosed British television journalist as well as a mass communications academic, Winston is convincing when he turns his feisty rhetoric on the correctly labeled "babble" of the blindly faithful techie. In the first pages of *Misunderstanding Media* he pinpoints the fate of our current electronic enthusiasms: the free transmission of signals will be curtailed by governments; new television hardware will not produce new content; videotext will not replace print; the telephone will never become a videophone; home computing will be a fad, then a hobby, or, at best, provide better typewriters for the rich. These, like the rest of Winston's introductory declarations, seem just about right.

At his very best, Winston expands his sobriety to a consideration of the scientific process itself. Progress is not, as cliché would have it, the qualitative result of quantitative growth in information. The intuitive individual inventor is alive today—as was collective experimentation 300 years ago. The actual use of information available will always be limited by the human ability to absorb it. Electronic technology will never have an impact more significant than the messages it carries.

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count for these discrepancies.)

The Keystones have usually been perceived as primitive birth pangs, documentations of how Chaplin tried, not always effectively, to squirm out of Sennett's slapstick bodylock. Geduld's affectionate readings seek out germinal plots, characters, and businesses that will show up in later, more elaborated forms. He also looks for movie and music-hall antecedents; an example would be bakeries that appeared as settings before *Dough and Dynamite.* (226) Among such burrowings, this antiquarian reviewer might add *What Happened in the Tunnel* (Edison 1903) and *A Kiss in the Dark* (AM&B 1904) to the tawdry tradition of a white male mistaking a black maid for the object of his affection (*His Favorite Pastime* 1914). To Chaplin's *Laughing Gas* (1914) Edison's *Laughing Gas* (1907) might be added, and before that Méliès's *Le Charlatan/Painless Dentistry* (1901) and *Le Diable Géant* (1902). Curiously, Geduld mentions *Uncle Josh at the Picture Show* (Edison 1902) elsewhere, but doesn't cite it when he describes *Kid's Auto Race* as "one of the first self-reflexive films in the history of the motion pictures." (18)

The value of a book like *Chapliniana* rests on the power of its verbal reconstructions to evoke our memories, perhaps our reconsiderations, of the films in question. Geduld has undertaken an awesome job with dedicated, scrupulous attention (excepting the six-reel *Tillie's Punctured Romance,* from which he gracefully excuses himself). If a problem exists, it's in the dreadful likelihood that a reader might confuse these descriptions (Geduld's or anyone else's) with the actualities of a screen event. This can't be done. Even in the first film, *Kid's Auto Race,* there's no verbal accounting for the angle shifts. (We are the camera before which Charlie struts; we are behind the camera; we are behind Charlie and looking at the camera.) There are the stray bystanders, seemingly amused both at Charlie and at the movie-making. There are cheering crowds, curiously ambiguous as to whether they're responding to the soapbox racers or to this funny new actor.

One other example. Take, randomly, *His Prehistoric Past.* ["Weakchin and King Lowbrow] shake hands and rub noses. . . . The king generously exchanges his club for Weakchin's cane. They head toward the encampment. . . . Weakchin picks a flea from the King's chest, places it on the ground and crushes it with a blow of his club. The king is mightily impressed. Weakchin takes his arm." (274–5)

Rubbing noses makes Chaplin sneeze. When he does, Mack Swain grasps Charlie's neck and thrusts a leg forward threateningly. Chaplin's flea clubbing reestablishes his command of the situation. Swain *offers* an arm to Chaplin, who does a momentarily flirtatious eye-batting. As they exit, Chaplin executes the quickest of winks toward the camera, and we see his club

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—JOHN FELL

THE MEMOIRS OF ALICE GUY BLACHÉ

By Alice Guy Blaché. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1986.

Sometimes film pioneers were just people who happened to be in a certain place at a particular time, like witnesses to a shooting. Mme. Blaché, known in France simply as Alice Guy and here, now and then, as Alice Blaché, was the other sort. She started as a secretary for Léon Gaumont in the spring of 1895 and by her testimony began filming little acted scenes during the next year, although historians argue about dating this event quite as early as the film-maker does. In any case, she soon became a central figure in the industry, crossing paths with Louis Feuillade and Ferdinand Zecca, among others.

Alice Guy married Herbert Blaché in 1907. The couple journeyed to the United States as business agents for Gaumont, but in short order they formed a new, independent business, Solax, joined the Motion Picture Patents Company, and started making Westerns in Flushing, later moving to Fort Lee. Appendices in this volume include several articles about Mme. Blaché, director, dating from 1912. They are uniformly commendatory. A year later, Herbert Blaché closed down Solax and founded Blaché Features, and it's probably not coincidental that Blaché Features featured Mme. Blaché, director.

Alice Blaché worked later for Pathé and Metro. She directed several productions built around Olga Petrova, Metro's studio-constructed "Russian noblewoman" who was born Muriel Harding in England. After divorcing in 1922, Alice Blaché returned to France, but she never made films again. A Legion of Honor award rescued her from obscurity in 1953. She spent her last years with a daughter in New Jersey, dying at the age of 95 in 1968.

As well as being the first female production talent, perhaps the first person to make fiction films, Mme. Blaché was by every account an able, practiced film-maker and producer, especially noted for her calm and her good humor, supported by a Gallic combination of candor and modesty. All these qualities are evident in the memoirs, and much of the book's charm rests in its perceptions of the United States. It is largely personal, but there are occasional moments of additional interest. Blaché says that except for the earliest ventures, Gaumont films were carefully scripted, never improvised. She tried to persuade Chaplin to make *The Italian Straw Hat* with her in 1920.

Anthony Slide, editor of Scarecrow's Filmmakers Series, is to be commended for arranging this book's initial French publication, now for facilitating its English version. As noted in Slide's foreword, none of the director's American features appear to have survived, which has made it impossible to adjudicate the quality of her ambitious later works. —JOHN FELL

Jean Mitry

This morning a friend called with the news of Jean Mitry's death. I've let him haunt me all day, listening to his voice which I recorded in an interview just three months ago, looking at the photograph which that same friend took of us together in Paris. Mitry warned me at that time that he was really ill, but I had laughed it off, for he had always claimed to be on the brink of death. I remember picking him up in 1970 at the airport near Iowa City and his asking if we had a hospital nearby since he was having problems with his heart and felt weak. Two hours later he was booming out a lecture, leaping to the blackboard and parrying questions so that the veins stood out on his forehead. And two months later he proudly claimed he had seen more films and written more words than when he was in his prime. In the intervening 18 years he has published volumes of film history, angry articles and letters about historiography, a book attacking the misuses of semiology in cinema, a book of poems, and doubtless scores of items I have no knowledge of.

He was writing at his desk when I saw him last, trying to set the record straight on Vitagraph after returning from the huge retrospective held in September at Pordenone, Italy. There he mingled with the younger generation of historians who were perched in anticipation of finding in this cache unexpected

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narrative strategies and new cultural functions that would overturn our standard view of cinema. Mitry said the Vitagraph material was disappointing. He found the Fatty Arbuckle retrospective, also featured at Pordenone, much more revealing, and so he was determined not to let these Vitagraphs be falsely inflated in importance simply because they were newly projected. In the debate he expected over Vitagraph, he made sure that no one would be able to surprise him with examples he had not already considered. Reports have it, and he confirmed, that only Ben Brewster sat with him through *all* the films at this marathon screening, some 160 titles I believe, projected from morning till past midnight day after day. Remember that fact the next time someone tries to dismiss Jean Mitry for not having attended sufficiently to the details of history in his quest for an overarching view of it.

Just yesterday, by unnerving happenstance, I had been rereading Mitry. Trying to get a grip on the phenomenon of poetic realism, I had gone completely through Volume IV of his *Histoire du Cinéma.* Mitry is by no means the hero of the book I'm writing; indeed I use him to stand for a brand of writing I presumptuously hope to surpass. Yet he is unquestionably the clearest thinker to have surveyed world cinema between the wars, the one, in addition, who routinely invokes the most examples from the most films. His representation of the period is unusually detailed; yet he stands out for the audacity of categorizing films not by simple chronology but on the basis of their semiotic functions. Carné, Grémillon, Chenal, and Vigo he places much closer to von Sternberg and Frank Borzage than to King Vidor, because, he argues, the signifier weighs heavily on, indeed determines, the signified in the former, whereas in Vidor one senses (and can verify) the priority of a set of concepts translated into images. The point may be obvious, or it may be wrongly put, but no other writer of his generation could make it strongly. More telling, few writers of our more academic era could rattle off scenes from five or six Borzage films, much less from Chenal or Gréville or from third-rank Japanese lyrical realists of the 1930s, all the while making an essentially semiological distinction. Mitry did indeed campaign on every front of our field, besting Sadoul's history with his sophisticated stylistic categories, arguing with Metz on the basis of historical example.

His feistiness won him few friends. Mitry was bullheaded and without the kind of elegance that often excuses French tenacity. I once read a caricature of him written by students from the French film schol IDHEC back in 1950. They made fun of his passion for ideas, of the way he would literally spit out his thoughts so that it was safer to sit in the back row. I'm sure he laughed at this picture of himself but never thought of changing his style or taming his passion for ideas. No film scholar was more devoted to a complete view of our civilization of images than he. I think he expected philosophers and cultural historians to learn from his books, the way he carried to film without pretension or difficulty his reading of Husserl, Russell, Piaget, and Francastel. Run through the bibliography at the end of his *Esthétique et Psychologie du Cinéma* and imagine it as an index to his mind.

We are impressed with this bibliography and with this mind because the age of the heroic film scholar is over. Mitry was the last of the giants. We have reproached him and his type for over a decade. He relied too often on his memory of films to please those of us rummaging in archives, and he repeated certain notions he formulated years ago too often for us film theorists who have been taught to question not just ideas but their origin and their "interest."

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—*Choice,* October 1987.

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Yet Mitry's defense of standard historiography (which one can read in the lengthy articles he wrote a few years ago in *Cahiers de la Cinémathèque*) and his more recent defense of his film theory (the attack on Metz called *Semiologie en Question*) are worth fighting over. I hate to think that he won't contribute to the next round in these debates.

But perhaps for American scholars he will so contribute. His death may bring some responsible publisher to bring out the translation of *Esthétique et Psychologie du Cinéma* that has been languishing for a decade. And it may spark some of us to read Brian Lewis's excellent and evocative book on him in the UMI series. One way or another every film scholar should come in contact with this mind, crammed full, as it was, with scenes and titles from thousands of movies seen across 75 years, this mind full of philosophy, science, psychology, literature, and art. Do his chronicles and theories gain authority from the fact that he played a part in Gance's *Napoleon,* helped found the Cinémathèque Française, and made the phenomenal *Pacific 231*? He staked his ideas on the full life he lived with and in the cinema. I regret that that life is over now except in those ideas. I know I'll file away my tape-recorded interview in some box of mementos, but the books will be open on my desk as they were this morning even before I got the bad news. —DUDLEY ANDREW

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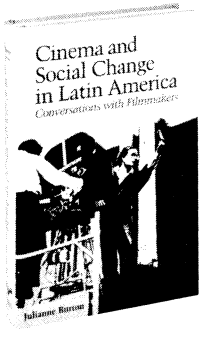

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